AFRICANA UNMASKED:

FUGITIVE SIGNS OF AFRICA IN TATE'S BRITISH COLLECTION

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ABSTRACT

Through painting, drawing, photography and digital design, I have investigated the relationship between, on the one hand, my fine art practice—with its interest in postcolonial African and diaspora identities (or, 'Africana')—and on the other hand, works at The Tate Gallery—with its remit to hold the National Collection of British Art. By interrogating iconological 'conditions of existence' for works by Fehr, Sargent and Brock, I created new artworks that indicated hidden (or, 'fugitive') African connections with the intention of disrupting complacent assumptions and reimagining unacknowledged (or, 'masked') themes.

I considered concepts of Africa: described by Mudimbe as 'discursive formations' (after Foucault) and embodying postcolonial, transracial identities; in addition, I addressed the problematics of Tate's British Art collection as a post-imperial brand of 'cultural capital'.

Unmasking fugitive Africana was a practical methodology designed to produce artworks. So, while aware of many theoretical interlocutors, I pursued a convoluted, sometimes intuitive path through the creative process by making drawings, digital designs, photographs and paintings. Nonetheless, Stuart Hall's framework of an 'oppositional code' was key and so I suggest that, as practiced by artists, 'unmasking Africana' might be an inherently counter-hegemonic, critical project.

My investigation embodied technical and conceptual problematics of critical enquiry as a mode of studio practice. I explored unmasking methodologies through reading, observation, reflection and painterly, synthesised appropriations—also witnessing an evolution in my imagery, from iconographically layered compositions to works in which identities and motifs seemed to fuse.

As well as the studio investigation and writing, my project had a pedagogic element. In a series of seminars, I taught MA students at C.C.W. Graduate School the preliminary findings of my research. My interviews with students produced evaluations about their learning, which I later disseminated as part of UAL's programme to reduce disparities between white and B.A.M.E. British undergraduate students..

STRUCTURE OF DOCUMENTATION

The methodology employed in unmasking fugitive Africana was an investigative and highly research-intensive practice that produced significant overlaps between my contextual readings, my conceptual methodology and my unmasking practices.

Nevertheless, this document can be conceived of, structurally, in three, interwoven parts: *Theory*, consisting of the Preface and Introduction, along with 'Section 1: Methodologies', which has four Chapters, 1–4. These consider the broad context of the research in historical, theoretical and contemporary terms and proposed my core methodology.

The next main, structural element is: *Practice*, which begins with research precedents from my own practice and then, in 'Section 2: Studio Practice' is documented in six Chapters, 5–10. This documents my research practice, and the understanding that it embodied, through three principal assignments with three artworks in Tate's British collection. In Appendix 1, I document an extension of my methodology and practice beyond Tate's collection. In addition, a pedagogic dimension to the practice has been included as Appendix 2, although, this might also be considered as a kind of reflection. Then, in Appendix 3, I gather together the main body of my new artworks in one place.

The third structural element is: *Reflection,* which is produced in the reflexive sub-chapters of 'Section 2: Studio Practice', and also, in my Conclusion through which I reflected broadly on my research with an overview of the entire project.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ACRONYMNS AND REFERENCE NOTES

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BCE – Before Common Era

BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

BPCJ – Black People's Campaign for Justice

CCW – Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Colleges of Art

EXIF – Exchangeable image file format

ICA – Institute of Contemporary Arts

MFA – The Boston Museum of Fine Art

PAR – Participatory Action Research

RAS – Retain-Achieve-Succeed

UAL – The University of the Arts, London

V&A – The Victoria and Albert Museum

* 'L' before a number in references denotes the Location in a Kindle electronic book e.g. 'L686' means Location 686.

** I have used the Harvard referencing system. However, because of the preponderance of anonymously authored articles online, including those published by corporate bodies, I have opted, in most instances to cite the name of the corporate body rather than to use 'Anon'. Hence, where I have used an anonymous article from the Tate Gallery's website, I have usually cited, for example, 'Tate, 2011', which directs readers to the full reference.

PREFACE

When we look at a work of art, especially when "we" look at one in which Black Folk appear—or do not appear when they should,—we should ask: What does it mean? What does it suggest? What impression is it likely to make on those who view it? What will be the effect on present-day problems, of its obvious and also of its insidious teachings? In short, we should endeavor to "interpret" it; and should try to interpret it from our own peculiar viewpoint.

(F.H.M. Murray, 1916, Washington, D.C.)

Fig. P.1: Left: Donkor, K., (2007) 'Elizabeth Rex Lives', (450mm x 600mm); Right: Hilliard, N., (attributed) c.1575 'Elizabeth I', (787mm x 610 mm)

This thesis documents my research into—and development of—a contemporary, visual-art-studio methodology that I have termed 'unmasking Africana'. By 'unmasking' I mean the process of revealing, showing, and representing hidden or little noticed phenomena; and by 'Africana' I mean people and phenomena with specific connections to Africa or to African and Diaspora peoples. Therefore, 'unmasking Africana' means the process of representing hidden or little noticed things relating to Africa, African people and African Diaspora peoples.

Because this research project was the culmination of several years of development in my artistic practice, it makes sense, in order to introduce my themes, that I recall a moment prior to the start of the project when key ideas were becoming embodied visibly in my work. So, to begin with I want to focus on the two images in Fig. P.1, above. On the left is my assemblage *Elizabeth Rex Lives,* created in 2007, and on the right is a portrait of Elizabeth I (1533–1603), Tudor queen of England, attributed to one of her favoured painters, Nicholas Hilliard (1547–

1619), and which was completed, possibly after a live sitting, in approximately 1575. Although my 2007 work predates the start of the present *Africana Unmasked* project by three years, a brief explanation of why I made *Elizabeth Rex Lives* and what I intended the work to signify will help explain my evolving approach to composition, subject and context.

In 2007, I was producing work for a series of three exhibitions, which I was also curating, to mark the bicentenary of the British Parliament's 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. For those exhibitions, titled *Hawkins & Co*, I wanted to make art that would critically embody the intimate but troubled interplay of signifying, visual cultures, and racialized identities across what the British cultural theorist Paul Gilroy (b. 1956) termed, in his book of the same name, *The Black Atlantic* (1993).

The phrase 'Black Atlantic' denoted the transnational, discursive realms of history and culture that appeared in the wake of the 400-year-long passage of thousands of European and American slave ships from Africa to the Americas (Gilroy, 1993; 4)—and I had called the exhibitions *Hawkins & Co* in order to remember the first, prominent, English kidnapper and slave-trader of Africans, Sir John Hawkins (1532–1595). Informed by my reading of that history and, in part, by my secondhand recollection of the 1991 installations *A ship called Jesus, An English Queen* and *A pirate* by the British artist Keith Piper (b. 1960)—that made reference to Elizabeth I's dealings with Hawkins (Piper, 1991)—I visited Tate Britain to view Hilliard's work.

My visit to the museum was significant in itself because it constituted an element of my practice that was interested in more than reprinted or digital images of Elizabeth I as iconographic symbols of Tudor history. I was also intrigued by the actual art object produced by Hilliard—as well as by its conditions of display. In this instance, I regarded my interest as an area of divergence from Piper's *An English Queen* because, although we both addressed the iconography of Elizabethan imagery, I was primarily concerned with how the positioning of such Tudor artworks in a national museum sustained the prestige of the monarch (and even of monarchy itself)—despite her involvement in Hawkins' glaring atrocities (Hazlewood, 2004; 313). That is to say, I was beginning to consider the possibility of foregrounding the art-historical, aesthetic and museological coding of Hilliard's politically charged work.

Given that starting point, I was also interested in what the art historian and theorist Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) might have described as the 'aura' of the portrait. By the concept of 'aura', (proposed in his seminal, 1938 text, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction; L216*), Benjamin meant that the received history and authenticity of an original artwork, such as Hilliard's painting of the regal leader of the English state religion, caused it to retain, even for modern viewers, something of a medieval, ritualistic, 'cultic' significance. Certainly, the art

historian Sir Roy Strong (b. 1935) suggested in *Gloriana*, his definitive, 1987 book about paintings of Elizabeth I, that in the 16th century Hilliard's work might have had just such a sacred meaning—as one amongst many embodiments of 'what we now call the cult of the Virgin Queen' (Strong, 1987; 42).

As well as wanting to witness, or perhaps to experience, the supposed aura of the artwork at Tate by documenting my bodily encounter as source material for my work, I was also interested in what else I could learn by such close contact. For, despite Benjamin's debatable theory that a reproduction destroys the aura of the original by 'actualizing' it for the viewer in a 'multiplicity of instances', my experience was also that 'reproductive technology'—such as photography, film or video—did not always fully actualize a reproduced artwork because often the reproduction failed to adequately convey information available in an original object that might be useful as artistic source material. This meant, for example, that the photographed image of Hilliard's painting on Tate's website did not include its frame, which (however long it had been with the painting) conveyed something of how its current owners and curators intended the artwork to be experienced by museum visitors. In that sense, the online image excised an integral part of how the painting was experienced in situ.

My own experience had been that inadequate photographic reproductions—whether on screen, or in print—could also fail to correctly 'actualize' the colour, detail, texture, or scale of an original painting, limited as they were by the technologies and strategies of the photographer, printer and display system. I thought that if I were to appropriate Hilliard's imagery in a new work, a visit to the museum would increase my access to whatever visual information was available in Hilliard's painting and in its conditions of display. Correspondingly, my visit to Tate Britain in 2007 became an integral part of my investigative, studio practice—including my walk into the gallery space and my lived encounter with Hilliard's painting.

During my visit I paid close attention to the painting, as well as to the ambience of the room and its visitors: I took notes, made sketches, and took digital photographs—including of the wall and frame. Then, returning to my studio and using my memory, photographs, sketches, notes, and official reproductions as source materials, I created *Elizabeth Rex Lives* by working in three distinct representational modes. In one mode, I made, using oil paints, a rough likeness of Hilliard's painting on a mass-market, readymade canvas: this was the mode of the oil-painted portrait. In the second mode I impaled the canvas and its wooden stretcher with hundreds of nails that formed a visual frame around the front elevation of the canvas. In the third mode I added a selection of everyday, readymade objects to the assemblage.

My intention was that the nails themselves would evoke the physical sensuality of similarly

pierced 'Nkisi' sacred carvings from the Congo region (Phillips, 1999; 245)—which borders my early-childhood home-state of Zambia in central Africa. The other symbolic objects were inspired by my 2005 visit to shrines devoted to Santeria, the West-African inspired syncretic religion of Cuba, in the Caribbean (the region where some of my family's ancestors had historically been enslaved); and, as already stated, my oil painting based on Hilliard's *Elizabeth* served to represent a portrait of somebody once thought to be God's representative in England, where I was born and from where I also derive some of my ancestry.

Thus, *Elizabeth Rex Lives* combined symbolic elements of sacramental belief systems from visual-art traditions located in all three geographic regions of the slave-trading triangle in which Elizabeth I became embroiled (Thomas, 2006; 156). That is, the artwork embodied, literally, modes of representation associated strongly (one might even say, stereotypically) with Africa, Europe and the Americas—as well as recalling the voyages of my own transnational, transracial biography in those regions. I used my representation of the three visual modes—oil-paint portraiture, Nkisi impalement and Santeria offerings—as the methodology for a series of ten, similar, canvas assemblages, collectively titled *UK Diaspora* (2007), that, when installed together, formed a map of the island of Great Britain.

In each assemblage careful attention was paid to the iconography of pre-existing British artworks and how I would interpret them in my new work. Consequently, for *Elizabeth Rex Lives*, in place of the roses that Hilliard had painted on Elizabeth's dress, I collaged digitally printed, individually labelled photographs of the many, acclaimed, BAFTA and oscar-winning film actors who had played her—including Cate Blanchett (b. 1969), Dame Helen Mirren (b. 1945), Dame Judi Dench (b. 1934) and Bette Davis (1908–1989) (Maltin, 2014). These images and texts were intended to critically signify the repeated, complicit (or negligent) silences in dozens of films that had created a cinematic culture of omission about the queen's role in the English slave trade.

Whilst the paint was still wet, I scratched off some of the cheek from my representation of Elizabeth, to reveal the already-dry, dark brown paint of the portrait's ground underneath (see fig. P.2, opposite).

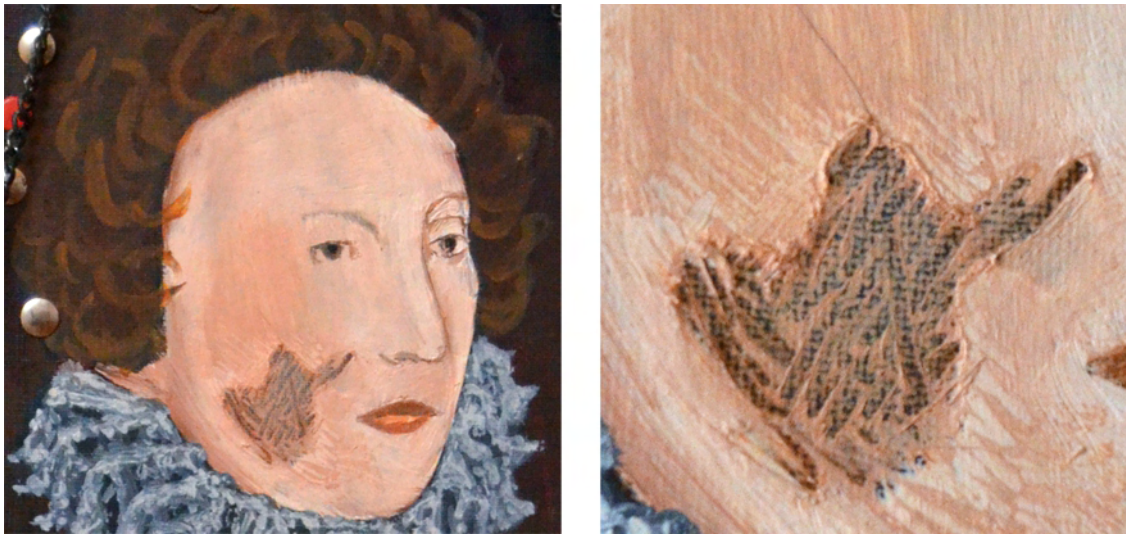

Fig. P.2: Left: Donkor, K., (2007) 'Elizabeth Rex Lives', (detail).
Right: Donkor, K., (2007) 'Elizabeth Rex Lives', (detail).

This was done using a palette knife that left multiple trails of the gesture of scraping in order to draw attention to the oil paint itself, to the underlying colour, and to the texture of the canvas support—and to thereby signal paint's nature as a mechanism of the imaginary which functions, literally, as a skin, cover or mask that conceals or reveals its support. By this process of breaking the illusionistic surface of my own paint, I also drew attention to my repetition of the painting methodology used by Hilliard to create the original image from which I worked, and which Strong had described, literally, as an Elizabethan 'mask' (Strong, 1987; 38). These attempts to signify the history and processes of cinema, the readymade, television, sculpture and paint were intended to specifically address the 400-year-long complicity of British and western arts, artists and art institutions in the erasure or marginalisation of certain Africa-related memories (or, as I later came to call them, 'Africana') connected with Elizabeth I.

In fact, Tate, as a critically engaged institution was, in some respects, curatorially aware of such problematics in the reception of works in its collection. The museum's press release for their own, 2007, slave-trade remembrance exhibition, *Blake and the Radical Mind*, spoke of how their recently acquired work *Grub for Sharks: A Concession to the Negro Populace* (2004) by the African-American artist Kara Walker (b. 1969) was, in itself, a 'critique of the camouflaging of the slave trade and subsequent histories' (Tate, 2007). Walker though, decided to publicly question in an online text, and in her work itself, what kind of gesture Tate had intended by collecting and exhibiting art that was said to critique the camouflaging discourse that some of its other objects might be deemed complicit in (Walker, 2004).

Of course, I did not think that either my work, or Walker's, were intended to hold Tate Britain, Hilliard, or anyone else, retroactively responsible for the English monarchy's actions

almost half-a-millennia ago. Nor did I imagine that the museum or Hilliard were responsible for contemporary, cinematic hagiography such as Blanchett's portrayal of the monarch in *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007). But, I did want to note that the Hilliard piece had been frequently hung in the main displays and, that neither its caption, nor any reference to it in Tate's website or publications, mentioned Elizabeth's well-documented relationship to slave-trading.

This filmic, art historical and museological omission of her complicity in such a globally significant event cannot have been because Elizabeth's slaving, despite its relative brevity, was a mere footnote in her long reign. Some historians have considered this theme, including Professor Harry Kelsey (b. 1929) in *Sir John Hawkins: Queen Elizabeth's Slave Trader* (2002), and Nick Hazlewood in *The Queen's Slave Trader: John Hawkyns, Elizabeth I, and the Trafficking in Human Souls* (2005). These writers have recounted how Elizabeth's agents in the slaving ventures—Sir John Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake (c. 1540–1596)—were also instrumental in precipitating conflict with the Spanish empire during their Atlantic voyages, and were subsequently promoted to lead the battle against the Spanish Armada—about which, the Blanchett film was a celebration of English, national pride.

Despite this continuing artistic silence (excepting, of course, for Piper), I also did not propose that Tate's museum captions, or its generic catalogue texts, necessarily include any critique of the nationalistic glorification at work in the Hilliard painting (Strong, 1987; 81). Could it be, rather, that *Elizabeth Rex Lives* was an instance of a more appropriate mode of intervention? Something which the French art theorist Guy Debord (1931–1994) might have recognised as a 'detournement'—a symbolic reversal of the intended meaning of a spectacular, pre-existing artwork (Debord IN Knabb, 2007; 14)? And, could this kind of intervention be a more effective, critical, counter-reading for all such hegemonically situated visual artworks?

Instead of placing a caption about slave-trading with the Hilliard work, would it not be more fitting for Tate, or similarly endowed museums, to exhibit work, such as Piper's '*An English Queen*', as a way to draw attention to and recontextualise such seemingly imperialistic propaganda which, arguably, is at work in much British art and art history? Certainly, that was an approach which was implicit in the work of artist Fred Wilson (b. 1961), who, in his 1991 installation, '*Mining the Museum*' collaborated with the Maryland Historical Society in order to produce 'harrowing… juxtapositions' (Copeland, 2013; 25) between artefacts. The juxtapositions Wilson created using 'readymade' objects exposed the neglected memorialisation of African people within institutions of the former slaveholding state. However, to the degree that installations of collection objects were ephemeral and contingent, perhaps the display of discrete, and more autonomous, permanent artworks—such as Piper's

—could be as effective critically?

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, which is one source for the title of this study, the anticolonial activist, psychiatrist and theorist Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) critiqued the complicit 'racialization' of western popular culture, partly through the visual arts. Writing in 1952, Fanon had suggested that this racializing tendency was a kind of psychological assault on formative African-Caribbean subject identities:

> *The black schoolboy in the Antilles [the Caribbean colonies of France] who, in his lessons is forever talking about "our ancestors, the Gauls", identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages—an all-white truth. (Fanon, 2008; 126)*

Indeed, whilst the exact phrase 'white mask' did not appear in Fanon's text, the quoted passage was, perhaps, emblematic of precisely what he meant by it: the hegemonic demand that black or African diaspora people internalize identification with an 'all white truth'. Having been born and mainly schooled in the English West Country where Drake and Hawkins were both from, their human trafficking was invisible to me—that is to say, it was masked—until my encounter in the mid-1980s with the influential, 1972 book by the Guyanese historian Walter Rodney (1942–1980): *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Rodney, 1983; 83). That is to say, before reading Rodney, I had been like Fanon's generic 'black schoolboy' in that I had been educated initially with the 'all-white' truth that Drake—who was regarded as a local hero—and Elizabeth I had no connection with my African heritage. Or rather, during the 1970s their connection to African Diaspora history was omitted universally from contemporary discourse, art, film and literature: with the emphasis instead on heroic exploits in the English Channel.

Similarly, in the contemporary, early-21st-century context of heightened national anxiety about immigration, how widely acknowledged has it been that the Tudor queen, in the aftermath of brutally deporting hundreds of West Africans from their own homelands into Caribbean bondage, had then ordered the deportation of all black residents from England? That incident of Elizabethan racial profiling was recalled by Edward Scobie (1918–1996) in *Black Britania: a History of Blacks in Britain* (1972; 8) and Peter Fryer, (1927–2006) in *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984; 10). But in the early 21st century the memory of the 16th-century deportation played almost no role in the public discourse about ethnic, racial and cultural diversity in Britain. In thinking about that little-known legacy of Elizabeth I, I wondered to what extent might wider dispersal of such knowledge provoke public approval, or indifference rather than horror? And, in thinking about how artworks might address such repressed or suppressed memories, the British art historian Kobena Mercer (b. 1960) wrote, about Keith Piper, that critical practice is able to lead us:

> *into an archeological journey which excavates hidden fears and fantasies that remain historically*

> *fossilised within the nervous system of the body politic. …[Critical] work reveals the convulsions of a multicultural society in which the descendants of colonisers and colonised alike are mutually enmeshed in histories that are not yet fully known. (Mercer IN Piper, 1997; 18)*

Although, perhaps the 'hidden fears' articulated in postcolonial, critical artworks are not so much those of Britain's white population towards their black compatriots, but rather, those of black Britons about the direction of their country, given its little understood past, and the obvious survival of widespread, historically volatile racism and xenophobia.

The art historian Huey Copeland (b. 1975) has noted that from the mid-twentieth-century onwards it was increasingly possible for critically-engaged, African-Diaspora artists to:

> *reorient our approach to visual culture in the age of capitalist modernity, that centuries-long cataclysm of conquest and colonization subtended by the theft of African subjects who subsequently became available for any use whatsoever. (Copeland, 2013; 12)*

By his phrase 'theft of African subjects', Copeland, himself African-American, was referring to how artists engaged with New World enslavement, and, certainly, *Elizabeth Rex Lives* could be regarded as an attempt to 'reorient' my approach to how the visual culture of British fine art and western film tended to mask the 'cataclysm of conquest and colonization'. Copeland, in his 2013 book *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* had focused on how, in the early 1990s, Glen Ligon (b. 1960), Lorna Simpson (b. 1960), Renee Green (b. 1959) and Fred Wilson had addressed a traumatized, African-American subjectivity through site-specific practices that drew attention to absence, loss, memory, resistance and reflection.

Similarly framed, site-specific interventions recalling un-memorialised connections between British museums and Africana had also been accomplished in the U.K., such as in Sonia Boyce's (b. 1962) film and installation *Crop Over* (2007), which drew attention to the slavery-derived fortunes of the Lascelles family who built, and continued to own, Harewood House in Yorkshire, where the work was partially filmed and was also displayed (Thompson, 2009).

Deciding to make my own contribution to this developing movement, in 2009, I recruited Tate Britain and Hilliard's *Elizabeth I* for what was, arguably, a similar purpose—that is to say, I attempted an intervention that disrupted normative engagement with the museum display.

Fig. P.3: Donkor, K., (3rd March, 2009). 'The Final Pin-Up', [Photographic documentation of collaborative performance at Tate Britain].

As part of Tate's *Seeing Through* programme, organised by Young People's Programme curator, Mark Miller, in which London foster children and carers were invited to participate in artistic activities at the museum (Tate, 2012), I staged a performance called *The Final Pin-Up*. Firstly, I placed my *Elizabeth Rex Lives* on an easel, adjacent to Hilliard's work in the gallery—which, was open to the public—and then, wearing a blazer and standing next to the two art objects, I adopted the declaratory conventions of 'the artist's talk' and explained to the audience how my work had been created in response to Queen Elizabeth's I role in Hawkins' voyage.

In appropriating those conventions, I was also conscious that *Cinema in the Round (2008),* by Mark Leckey (b. 1964), which featured a compilation of the artist's talks, had recently been on display at the museum. However, *The Final Pin Up* was intended as a participatory performance, so that after my introductory remarks I invited the audience to contribute by helping to complete the unfinished *Elizabeth Rex Lives* through the physical act of attaching to it a missing necklace that I had crafted from black and gold-coloured safety pins.

Given that Hawkins and Elizabeth I had deported their enslaved victims to the Spanish colony of Hispaniola (which encompasses contemporary Haiti), the participants were also invited to join me in chanting 'Liberty or Death', which I understood to have been a slogan of Haiti's abolitionist African revolution of 1791–1804 (James, 2001; 295). Accepting my invitation, a number of audience members then pierced my painted representation of Elizabeth's bare throat with the safety pins, chanting 'Liberty or Death'. *Elizabeth Rex Lives* was then removed from the gallery, along with its newly attached necklace. I arranged for the event, to be documented by photographs and video (see figure P.3, above).

Fig. p.4: Left. Rossetti, D.G., (1865) The Beloved ('The Bride') Courtesy Tate Britain. Right; Anon. (Before 2000) Pimlico station Tate artworks mural. [Photography Donkor, K., 2013]

Having considered my 2007–2009 use of the unstated and visually fugitive relationship between Hilliard's subject and the African world, I want to recall another preliminary event that also signalled the genesis of this research through encounters with art at Tate. In 2009, I attended a gallery tour led by the British-Nigerian conceptual artist Raimi Gbadamosi (b. 1965) and which had been organised by Tate's Cross Cultural programmes curator, Paul Goodwin (b. 1966) (who, in 2013, became Professor of Black Art and Design at the University of the Arts London). Speaking about *The Beloved ('The Bride'),* a work created in 1865 by the pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), Gbadamosi reminded us of the large murals at nearby Pimlico underground station that advertised Tate's collection[1].

Each mural represented almost the entirety of an original work—except the mural of the Rossetti painting. In that instance, the original composition had been severely truncated, such that the foregrounded black figure in Rossetti's painting no longer appeared, leaving only the other five female figures to populate the mural (Fig.2). Gbadamosi had speculated interestingly about the possible motives for this symbolic erasure, but it was from these encounters, particularly with the works of Hilliard, Piper, Rossetti and the anonymous muralist, as well as through my own critical studio enquiry, that the idea for this investigation first arose.

My research premise began by acknowledging that Tate's British Art collection included many

1. I have been unable to discover the date, or the artist, of the Pimlico Station murals. However, they must have been created between 1972 (when the station was first opened) and 2000. I have been visiting the museum since settling in London in 1984, and cannot remember them not being there. My reason for suggesting 2000 as the latest possible date is because the murals illustrate works in Tate's International Modern Art Collection by artists like Dali and Picasso. However, from 2000 onwards, the International Collection was exhibited at Tate Modern, which is 3 km away, and so it would have made no sense to include them in the Pimlico murals if they had been painted after 2000.

works in which visible signs of African histories and identities—that is, Africana—were often displayed prominently: whether in the form of postcolonial critique such as in Keith Piper's *Go West Young Man*, (Piper, 1987) or else, amongst many other forms, in the kind of Africanist-Orientalist spectacle of Rossetti. It was these kinds of visible or spectacular manifestations of African identity that had been increasingly foregrounded, not only in books such as David Dabydeen's 1987 volume *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in 18th-Century English Art,* but also in exhibitions, such as the Tate Gallery's *Picturing Blackness in British Art 1700s–1990s.* That display, which had been selected and curated by Paul Gilroy, was on view from November 1995 to March 1996. Gilroy, writing in the four page exhibition essay, had asserted that:

> *[w]e urgently need a more exhaustive account of how slavery, imperialism and colonialism contributed to the formation of modern British cultural styles and aesthetic tastes […and] to consider how the relationship between Britain's colonial outside and its national inside was constantly negotiated and presented in artistic form. (Gilroy, 1995)*

And, certainly, in some respects my research project might contribute to a more exhaustive account of Britain's aesthetic tastes as constituted by the national collection. However, what I wanted to attend to, primarily, were other works—such as the Hilliard portrait—in which there was comparatively little, if any, visible or even iconological and contextual reference to Africana. In my pre-research response to that possibility, I had experimentally asked, through *Elizabeth Rex Lives* and *The Final Pin-Up,* whether the act of representing an existing image in a certain context of alterity, could effectively critique what the French philosopher of race and nationalism Ernest Renan (1823–1892) called a national 'forgetfulness' (Renan IN Sand, 2010) about one aspect of British Africana? A forgetfulness, not about the ending of the English slave trade, but about its founding moment.

Renan had proposed, in his influential, 1882 essay, that atrocities committed in the early life or prehistory of any given nation needed to be forgotten if formerly antagonistic peoples were to be reconciled. I needed to ask whether, in contrast to my own work, the Pimlico station mural of Rossetti's painting represented a Renan-ist gesture? Was the mural not the recuperation but, instead, the symbolic erasure of a discomforting memory from a canonical artwork—an embodied desire to revise '*The Bride*'?

It was difficult to judge whether or not the Pimlico muralist had intended to shield passers-by from the possibility that one of the gallery's most iconic paintings was a racist celebration of supposed African 'inferiority' or 'ugliness' (given the figure's diminutive size, low position, and gesture of servility)? This possibility was raised in Tate's anonymous, 2004, gallery caption for the painting itself, which was one of three extant online statements about *The Beloved ('The Bride)*' hosted on the museum website:

> *Some modern commentators suggest that Rossetti is celebrating the diversity of beauty. Others see it as racist, a visualisation of the supremacy of the bride's whiteness, in contrast to the darker complexions of her attendants. (Tate, 2004)*

But, if the muralist felt, like Tate's unidentified "modern commentators", that the Rossetti painting was overtly racist, why did they reproduce it in the train station? Or, did the muralist intend to shield viewers from the other possible readings alluded to in Tate's caption: that Rossetti was celebrating black youthful beauty; or an African presence in Victorian Britain; or Africanism in Britain's imagination? In which case, was the muralist motivated by feelings of racism in their decision to omit the black figure? Or, did they justify their omission on 'formal' grounds—wanting to create a mural in landscape format from an image in portrait format?

The questions were multiple—and the answers remained mysterious to me. This was because the Pimlico mural, like the Hilliard-attributed painting, were not part of Tate's collection (Hilliard's work was on long-term loan from the National Portrait Gallery). Consequently, because I had set Tate's British art collection as my field of study, then the questions raised by my engagement with both of those works only had a preliminary research status, and so they could not be considered in depth and as central to my future investigation.

This study then, looked at the critical possibilities afforded by less visible, obvious or spectacular erasures, forgettings, invisibilities, discontinuities and counter-logics, that might represent a kind of 'fugitive', half-hidden, anxious Africana in the National Collection of British Art. Such possibilities were inevitably liminal, complex, open-ended, perhaps indeterminate, and, as such, they prompted a similarly uncertain tone of artistic enquiry. *Elizabeth Rex Lives* was not a stridently obvious Kara Walker-type restaging of slavery's depravities (Shaw, 2004), but was instead, intended to reflect Hilliard's mannered, formal restraint (although, in other respects, such as its displays of wealth, skill and pallor, the 1575 work was notably extravagant).

Additionally, in pursuing the possibilities attended to in *Africana Unmasked*, my relationship to theory was also liminal, eclectic and cautionary, as my enquiry was not seeking to prove or disprove one or other philosophical theory, nor was it an attempt to shoehorn practice into a specific theorist's outlook. I was not alone amongst researchers who welcomed the invitation from the French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1926–1984), to treat theory as 'a kind of toolbox' (IN O'Farrell, 2005; 50), and, although I treated Fanon as a starting point, I was wary that it might have been this just this kind of investigation he was thinking of when he wrote:

> *I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between a Negro philosopher and Plato. But I can absolutely not see how this fact would change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labour in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe. (Fanon, 2008; 205)*

Fanon's warning against such esotericism might have been aimed particularly at my interest in the cultural significance of an entirely artistic figure, who first appeared in close cultural proximity to Plato—namely, Andromeda, mythical queen of Mycenae in Ancient Greece and after whom stars, galaxies, movies and TV shows were being still named in contemporary, 20th and 21st-century western culture. Nevertheless, my enquiry was not so much a search for unknown, far-off, ancient events as it was a gathering together and critical analysis of specific information about particular artworks and the discursive narratives that accompanied them—all in the context of my studio practice and its exploration of a contemporary institution.

From the very beginning, my conceptualisation of the term 'studio practice' was expansive because I did not regard the making of artworks as a practice that could be restricted discursively to such technical problematics as, for example, the best viewpoint from which to execute a life drawing, or the adjustment of camera angles—(although these are also the type of technical questions that I have documented). Instead, by working in what I regarded as a contemporary movement of history 'painters' that included such practitioners as Mary Evans (b. 1963) and Keith Piper, I thought that my understanding of abstract concepts, such as art-historical veracity and social ethics, were as indispensable an aspect of my studio activity as was my ability to prime a canvas.

Consequently, the focus of this investigation has also been on how as an artist I tried to navigate my pathway through the sometimes unconvincing truth claims of art historians, biographers and curators, as well as other artists—in order to establish what I judged to be a satisfactory decoding of images and their accompanying texts. In Chapters 8 and 10, because of the absence of what I considered to be coherently thorough contextualisations of artworks in Tate's collection by J.S. Sargent (1856–1925) and Thomas Brock (1847–1922), my 'decoding' activities assumed a more prominent role, vital to the fulfilment of my artistic requirements, and so formed a correspondingly signifiant element of my documentation.

My discursive interest in the mythology of Andromeda, documented in Chapter 5, and embodied in my painting *The Rescue of Andromeda* (2011)—documented in Chapter 6—enabled me to measure the extent to which Andromeda was a typical example of fugitive Africana in Tate's collection. In what ways could the art historian Elizabeth McGrath's (b. 1945) iconographical analysis of *The Black Andromeda* (McGrath, 1992) act as a useful starting point for an artistic enquiry into whether unmasking Africana in Tate's British collection might facilitate my critical studio practice? However, in order to effectively consider embarking on such a practical proposal, I needed to investigate what was meant by the conceptual terms 'British', 'African' and 'Africana'—both in relation to art practice, and also to Tate's collection.

INTRODUCTION

Working Concepts Of Africana And Britishness

My studio research practice, which intended to critically 'unmask' Africana, was inherently dependent on my ability to identify indices, icons and symbols of African identity. However, in order to pursue this path, I needed to analyse what I meant by the term 'African', or indeed, the term 'British'—how could such concepts be understood by reference to art, ethnicity, nationality, history, race or geography? Consequently, in my Introduction, I want first to consider the geopolitical terms 'African' and 'Africana' as instances of what Foucault had termed 'discursive formation' in his 1969 book, A*rchaeology of Knowledge* (2002).

By 'discursive formation' Foucault meant that a perceived 'object' of scientific knowledge might, in different statements, be denoted by one term (such as, the geo-historical term 'Africa' along with its derivatives, 'African' and 'Africana'). Nevertheless, any collection of such statements, the creation of which was dispersed in time and space, might seem so different in content that it was impossible to regard them as 'referring to a single object, once and for all and… preserving it indefinitely as its horizon of inexhaustible ideality'(Foucault, 2002; 35). Instead, objects of knowledge were 'formed' by a multiplicity of epistemic statements that established, 'the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time' (Foucault, 2002; 35).

The discursive formation of 'Africa' was investigated by the Congolese philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (b. 1941) who, in his 1988 book *The Invention of Africa*, considered how 'Africa' as an object of disciplinary knowledges had undergone multiple transformations in different 'epistemes'—that is, across different historical eras of scientific thought in the Renaissance, Enlightenment and Modern periods (Foucault, 2002; 221/Mudimbe, 1988; L772). Hence, Mudimbe identified how, in considering the implications of such epistemes:

> *Two very different discursive formations—the discovery of African art and the constitution of the object of African Studies, that is the "invention" of Africanism as a scientific discipline—can illustrate the differentiating efficiency of such general classifying devices as pattern of reality, designation, arrangement, structure and character. (Mudimbe, 1988; L339)*

Considering that what Foucault had described as the 'rules of discourse' were produced by powerful, disciplinary institutions and events, I decided to analyse two broad models that produced different, concurrent, categorical possibilities of African identity through curatorial, artistic and academic power. And, consequently, I considered how such models could be useful to my practice. Furthermore, I outlined discourses about Britishness and Tate, and considered too, the discursive interplay between the three terms: British, Tate and African.

Africana as discursive formation

In 2010, when I first decided to use the term 'Africana' as an investigative concept, I was aware that it was little known in Britain. Conversely (according to the sociologist Delores P. Aldridge (b. 1941) writing in *Out of the Revolution: The Development of Africana Studies),* by the turn of the 21st century, Africana was becoming an increasingly widespread academic term in the United States (Aldridge, 2003; 528)[2].

Much of this expanding 'discursive formation' arose through programmes, departments and centres that had been known as African-American Studies, Afro-American Studies and Black Studies. Many, like those at Harvard and Princeton, continued to be known as African-American Studies, or (Black Studies, such as at Portland State University), whilst others used the term Africana—such as at San Francisco State University or at the Africana Studies and Research Centre at Cornell University (ASRC) in Ithaca, New York, which was established in 1969 by its founding director, James Turner (Turner, 2003; 61). Consequently, by 2012, approximately three hundred graduates had earned doctorates in the field (West, 2012; 10).

Turner conceived of Africana Studies programmes as being interdisciplinary in character, with a common emphasis on researching historical and ethnographic continuities and ruptures within and between the history, historiography and cultures of African peoples in the Americas and in continental Africa (Turner, 2003; 61).

Professor Robert L. Harris, Jr, a professor of African-American history at Cornell, served as the director of ASRC from 1986 to 1991 and, in an essay titled *The Intellectual and Institutional Development of Africana Studies*, he proposed the scope of the field in the following terms:

> *Africana Studies is the multidisciplinary analysis of the lives and thought of people of African ancestry on the African continent and throughout the world. It embraces Africa, Afro-America, and the Caribbean, but does not confine itself to those three geographical areas. Africana studies examines people of African ancestry wherever they may be found—for example, in Central and South America, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Its primary means of organization are racial and cultural. Many of the themes of Africana studies are derived from the historical position of African peoples in relation to Western societies and in the dynamics of slavery, oppression, colonization, imperialism, emancipation, self-determination, liberation, and socio-economic and political development. (Harris, 2004; 15)*

Consequently, Africana might be regarded as an intercontinental, trans-epochal, conceptual plane of Africa-related connections and ruptures. Harris's delineation of the scope of Africana academic programmes, made clear that they had a wide purview, affording plenty of opportunity for scholars to specialise. Consequently, I thought that Africana could also

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2. See also: Conyers, 1997; Aldridge, & James, 2008;

arguably be considered as a 'discursive object' that was, in part, constituted through a diverse, discursive formation known as Africana Studies. Neither the term 'Africana', nor the study of Africa-related themes originated in U.S. Black Studies departments—but, it was in U.S. academies where 'Africana Studies' had flourished.

Given the crisis-ridden discourse of racial politics in the U.S., the epistemological histories of Africana Studies itself were necessarily complex. Educational historians like Martha Biondi (2014) and Willie Nelson Jr (2003) foregrounded the important role, in the late 1960s, of anti-racist, African-American, student protest in the institutionalization of the discipline (Biondi, 2014; 3). And, given such a contested, politicized environment, competing critiques related to liberalism, Marxism, Feminism, Afrocentricty and Pan-African nationalism also contributed to shaping the discourse (Biondi, 2014). Consequently, the changes of name from Negro-, to Black- to African-American- and more recently, to Africana Studies, seemed to correspond with radical, decisive ruptures in the very 'epistemes' that had constituted a series of discursive 'Africas' in North America, and which began with the English terms 'captive', 'savage', 'heathen' and 'slave' in the colonial 17th-century (Jordan,1969; 514) only to arrive, in 2008, at the honorific 'President', with the election of Barack Obama (b. 1961) to the United State's highest office. However, by mobilising a discourse of restorative self-identification, John Henrik Clarke (1915–1998) had accounted for the changes in terminology by asserting that:

> *Black or Blackness tells you how you look without telling you who you are, whereas Africa, or Africana, relates you to land, history, culture. (Clarke, 1980 IN Turner, 2003; 60)*

Despite these apparent conceptual ruptures, there was also a discourse that recalled continuities of lineage from Leo Hansberry's 1920s, African Studies programmes at the historically black, Howard University in Washington DC that had focussed on ancient, African civilisations (Robinson 2004; 125); as well as from Clarke's own Black and Puerto Rican Studies department at New York University established in 1969 (King IN Aldridge, 2003; 121), with its more contemporary, sociological/political-science emphasis.

However, when it touched upon considerations of the African continent, the way Africana Studies constituted its discursive formation of Africa, evidenced a tendency to lack considerations of Africa north of the Sahel. That is to say, the Africana Studies paradigm tended to focus on the peoples of West, central and southern Africa—the principle homelands of deportees enslaved in the Americas. Excluding Ancient Egypt, Mali and Kush, which were considered as foundational black civilizations by seminal scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop (1974; 146), I found little evidence of a wide, sustained academic interest in those regions and peoples of contemporary Africa which, today, speak mostly Arabic or Berber

languages. Notable exceptions to this disinterest in Maghreb history included texts such as *Golden Age of the Moors* (1992) by the Rutgers professor, Ivan Van Sertima (1935–2009).

My aim in considering Africana as a discursive formation was not to analyse in great detail its scholarly content but was intended, instead, to consider the scope and multiplicity of its constitutive formation. However, I did think it important to register how the field of Africana Studies had been contested with regard to its perceived status as the academic heartland for the conceptual outlook known as Afrocentricty. Propounded by, among others, the philosopher Molefi Asante (b. 1942) and the educationalists Marimba Ani and Maulana Karenga (b. 1941), Afrocentricity could, perhaps, be considered as a code, or perspective, intended to guide a scholar's approach to teaching and learning. So, in 1987, Asante proposed that Afrocentricity, 'means, literally placing African ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves African culture and behaviour' (Asante, 1997; 2). James Stewart, another pioneering professor of African American Studies, summarised the practice as being defined by:

> *the degree of overlap between an idealized model of thought generated from an interpretation of traditional African thought and practice and an individual's actual thought and behaviour. (Stewart, 1997; 121)*

Afrocentric thinkers contended that the context of their approach was that much of academic life in the west and beyond was governed by assumptions which they critiqued as a 'Eurocentric consciousness that excludes the historical and cultural perspectives of Africa' (Asante, 1997; 5). Furthermore, Eurocentric concepts were regarded as having been:

> *based on White supremacist notions whose purposes are to protect White privilege and advantage in education, economics, politics and so forth… [Eurocentricism] presents the particular historical reality of Europeans as the sum total of the human experience. It imposes Eurocentric realities as "universal" i.e. that which is White is presented as applying to the human condition in general, while that which is non-White is viewed as group-specific and therefore not "human". (Asante, 2003; 39)*

Thus, Asante offered a critique of those hegemonic educational systems that normalized and privileged whites through a knowledge/power system rooted, historically, in the violent epistemes of racist white supremacy, colonialism, neocolonialism, segregation and apartheid.

However, Asante asserted that Afrocentricity did not intend to and could not replace Eurocentrism as a form of domination, because Afrocentricity sought and embodied multiculturalism, not the hegemonic monopoly embodied by Eurocentrism (ibid). Consequently, Afrocentric thought seemed intended to function in its relation to Africana and European people, in a way that was arguably comparable to how Feminist thought was intended to function in its relation to the gendered social categories, female and male. For

example, in *Feminism is For Everybody* (2000), the educationalist bell hooks (b. 1952) advocated 'consciousness raising' for women and men 'that would change our attitudes and beliefs via a conversion to feminist thinking' (hooks, 2015; 8, 11). And, in a way that also seemed analogous to Afrocentric aims, hooks praised the construction of 'a body of feminist literature coupled with the demand for the recovery of women's history' (ibid; 20).

I also thought that, while Fanon was not Afrocentric, the Eurocentric[3] ideology critiqued by Asante and his peers resembled, in form and content, the debilitating mythology of an 'all white truth' that Fanon had observed in the French, colonial education system (Fanon, 2008; 114). Indeed, a critique of Eurocentric pedagogies has continued to be pursued from beyond Afrocentric paradigms—so, for example, the Marxist historian Peter Gran has argued that, in the discipline of world history, 'Eurocentrism influences nearly all established historical writing' (Gran, 1996; 2). And, in the field of critical theory, Homi K Bhabha (b. 1949) contended in 1994 that Foucault:

> *introduces a Eurocentric perspective at the point at which modernity installs a 'moral disposition in mankind'. The Eurocentricity of Foucault's theory of cultural difference is revealed in his insistent spatializing of the time of modernity. (Bhabha, 2004; 349)*

Thus, in response to Foucault's centring of the French Revolution as the foundation of modernity, Bhabha proposed that from the perspective of the formerly enslaved citizens of Haiti, it was their revolution in San Domingo which represented a decisive rupture (ibid). Furthermore, critiques of Eurocentrism have also been produced in the field of art criticism: so, for example, hooks proposed that the paintings of the African-American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) had represented a challenge to the:

> *Eurocentric gaze that commodifies, appropriates and celebrates… [and that] from a Eurocentric perspective, one sees and values only those aspects that mimic familiar white Western artistic traditions. (hooks, 2012; 29)*

However, critical writing against racism in the academy did not, in every case, regard Eurocentrism as an entirely negative element of critique—with one example being the linguist and historian Martin Bernal (1937–2013). Writing in *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic roots of classical civilization* (1987) Bernal had argued persuasively that Ancient Greek culture had derived much of its founding impetus from more mature African and Asian civilisations of the Mediterranean such as Ancient Egypt. Later, in defence of his theory, he conceded:

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3. The critical neologism 'Eurocentrism' had been coined in 1988 by a political economist, the Egypt-born, French-educated, Samir Amin (b. 1931). (Amin, 2010)

> *that my choice of this theme is Eurocentric. Given the hegemonic position of European culture in the world today, I am convinced that this choice is a particularly important one. (Bernal, 2001; 30)*

Evidently, Bernal thought that in order to rigorously deconstruct what he saw as the erroneous claims of a Eurocentric representational paradigm, it was necessary to place those same claims at the centre of his sceptical gaze and of his reparative treatise.

However, critiques of Eurocentrism have also been mobilised to repudiate what were deemed as 'essentialist' claims of Afrocentricity, and such repudiations seemed to reconstitute the discursive formation of Africana in ways critical of Afrocentricity. Accordingly, historian Tunde Adeleke, a Director of African American Studies at Iowa State University, contended that Afrocentric essentialism had emerged in a social context shaped by a:

> *Historical discourse of black alienation and resistance… [in which] historically, Eurocentric essentialism engendered misery… and subjugation. Whether in slavery or freedom it nurtured in blacks alienated consciousness, provoking resistance and ultimately the development of a combative countervailing worldview. (Adeleke, 2011; 13)*

In some respects, Adeleke's observation of the sociopolitical effects of white supremacy seemed in accord with Afrocentric critique. However, he disputed any suggestion that:

> *continental Africans and all blacks in Diaspora [are] one people who share identical historical and cultural experiences critical to survival and success in their historical and existential struggle against forces of white/European historical and cultural hegemony. (Adeleke, 2011; 12)*

Rather than considering Africans and African Americans as a single Ethnos, united by deep, historically observable undercurrents of culture and experience, Adeleke proposed that, in any event, contemporary Africa could not represent such an idealized conception. Modern, continental states were, instead, 'conglomerates of conflicting, diverse and mutually resentful ethnic and linguistic groups' (ibid; 126). Adeleke suggested that in a reconstructed academic climate where prior, racial theories 'had limited value and diminished status', Afrocentric essentialism had, instead, foregrounded untenable rhetoric about a historical continuum of global African culture (ibid; 12).

Adeleke's text referred to Stuart Hall and, certainly, his polemic seemed to share Hall's intention to announce 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' elucidated in his 1989 essay, *New Ethnicities*. In that text, Hall had advocated:

> *recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which comprise the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature… (Hall, 2006; 443)*

By stressing subjective diversity and the 'politically and culturally constructed' category of blackness, Hall had also seemed to restate and reformulate Fanon's 1952, deconstructive assertion that 'The Negro is not. Any more than the white man' (Fanon, 2008; 181). Fanon was not suggesting that people who were categorised as black or white did not have a bodily existence in a historical, material world. What he meant was that the categories themselves were 'drowned in contingency' (ibid) and, thereby, open to contestation.

Africana, then, could be thought of as a complex, discursive formation, with a contested history, context and content but, also, with representative, institutional embodiments. Consequently, given my focus on art in Tate's British Collection, how might the term 'Africana' find its embodiment in British artistic, museological, art-historical or curatorial practice? In the analysis that follows, I have concentrated on the identity of artists, rather than the content of their artworks. And this concentration was not because I had no interest in their work, but because specific exhibitionary events seemed to have been curated on the basis of the artists' biographical proximity to various Africana identities, as well as for their work's content. As a result, the exhibitionary practices I have considered also functioned as a basis from which to interrogate how Africana artistic identities were negotiated in the curatorial, discursive process.

As one of the principal, Tate Liverpool exhibitions of 2010, *Afro-Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic* utilised Gilroy's concept of the black Atlantic as its central motif. *Afro-Modern* featured work by leading contemporary and modernist artists from dozens of countries as far afield as Kenya, Brazil, the U.K., the U.S., Nigeria and Cuba. Amongst the artists selected there were, for example, Wangechi Mutu (b. 1972), Helio Oiticica (1937–1980), Sonia Boyce, Kara Walker, Adebisi Akanji (b. c. 1935) and Wilfredo Lam (1902–1982). The curatorial premise was that, for artistic discourse, the black Atlantic 'formed a complex picture of cultural exchange and continuity' in which 'the slave journeys of the Middle Passage take on a pre-eminent and foundational position' (Barson, 2010; 9).

The curators Tanya Barson and Peter Gorshlütter (b. 1974) also included works by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Edward Burra (1905–1976) amongst many other non-African artists, who were selected either for their interest in, or, for their being influenced by (and influencing) African art, cultures and peoples. Even so, despite the inclusion of these white artistic figures the exhibition seemed to exemplify many of the key concepts of the Africana Studies model of African identity, particularly with regard to the centrality of diaspora, and also of cultural continuity (although, the term 'Africana' was not used).

However, having introduced to my research the academic, discursive formation of Africana and an example of an approximate curatorial corollary, I thought that it would then be

necessary to introduce alternative methods of discussing and attributing African identities: as propounded by the 'African Studies' epistemic models. One initial observation was that, like their Africana Studies counterparts, African Studies centres and departments ('African' as opposed to 'Africana' with a terminal 'a') were also represented as separate, distinct institutions across North American academia. Conversely, what distinguished them in terms of their national location was that, unlike *Africana* Studies, the African Studies model was also represented widely in European, African and Asian universities (Robinson, 2004; 120).

Schools of African Studies tended to be based on an anthropological/developmental 'Area Studies' model, that, in its origins, had institutional links to European attempts in the 19th and early 20th centuries to assert a 'modern' discourse of intellectual, military and economic mastery over newly conquered and supposedly 'primitive' southern colonies (Mudimbe, 1990; Martin, 1984). In the eastern hemisphere, this interdisciplinary model was characterised by institutions such as: the School of Oriental and African Studies (S.O.A.S.) in London; the African Studies centre at the University of Oxford; and, the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. In North America's white-majority universities (where the model developed somewhat later as a consequence of the country's Cold-War-era interest in global, political economies) a typical example was the African Studies Center at UCLA.

According to Asante, African Studies, particularly in white-majority Universities in Europe and the U.S., tended to disavow a sustained interest in the black Atlantic discourse of enslavement and diaspora, which was vital to the Africana Studies model (Asante, 1997; 79). Consequently, in the U.S., this disavowal of diaspora had led to political discord and rupture when, in 1969, a cadre of black scholars (led by John Henrik Clarke) tried to reform the white-dominated, African Studies Association (ASA) (Martin & West, 1999; 96). Their proposals included ending the manifest marginalisation of black scholars, critiquing the academic, colonialist 'tribalization' of African peoples, and refocusing the field on the study and liberation of 'all black people' (including African-Americans) (ibid). Eventually, according to the Africanist historiographers William Martin and Michael West, the ASA voted against the proposals—despite significant support for the reforms—and, as a result:

> *the segregation of the study of continental Africa and that of the diaspora remained in place and was even strengthened in often unintended ways by the creation at major research universities of programs that were largely restricted to the study of African Americans. (ibid; 106)*

For Martin and West, then, white intransigence and black resistance had contributed to the academic bifurcation of the discursive formation of Africa. What is now known as Africana Studies emerged, in part, out of black scholars refusal to accept a eurocentric African Studies.

Furthermore and, again, in the United States especially, the white-majority, area studies-based, 'Africanist' academies had also tended to concentrate on Africa to the south of the Maghreb states (Asante, 1997; 72). This was, perhaps, partly in deference to the academic, territorial purview of another 'area studies' position, which the postcolonial theorist Edward Said (1935–2003) had critiqued as 'Orientalist' studies (Said, 2003). In that respect, within the territorially and ethnographically restricted vista of African Studies:

> *"Africa" encompassed only sub-Saharan Africa… Such a definition marked, of course, a sharp break with the earlier generation of pan-African scholarship, which stressed ties across boundaries of North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the wider African world; the study of African civilisations and kingdoms, central to the vindicationalist tradition, was studiously shunted aside. (Martin & West, 1999; 96)*

The artist and writer Olu Oguibe (b. 1964) was amongst many African commentators who regarded this arbitrary, discursive border—located conceptually in the Sahara—as an atavistic desire to project onto Africa a complex of exclusionary, racialized anxieties about 'civilization' and 'savagery' (Oguibe, 2004; 5). Such epistemic tendencies could, perhaps be regarded as functioning to reproduce an 'Orientalist' discourse for the north of the continent, representing a paradigm of barbarism and civilization, whilst the 'African' ('black African', or 'sub-Saharan') world to the south had emerged from a discourse originally intended to constitute (or else, refute) a so-called, primitive 'savage'. However, in its tendency to produce a seemingly racialized incomprehension of Africa north of the Sahel, the eurocentric African Studies mode seemed to have an affinity with some black-majority, Africana Studies schools (except with regard to the latter's interest in Ancient Egypt and Kush).

Indeed, the political scientist Pearl T. Robinson (b. 1945) in her essay, *Area Studies in Search of Africa* (2004), theorized that, adjacent to the trans-Atlantic purview of Africana Studies, and to the 'sub-Saharan' constraint of African Studies, there was a third, 'spatially differentiated' Africa, constituted for, within and by African Universities and continental African scholars themselves, and which, whilst declining to invoke the trans-Atlantic discourse with great vigour, instead asserted a transcontinental, Pan-African model that included all of the so-called[4] 'continent's' regions. Robinson proposed that the Ugandan academic Mahmood Mamdani (b. 1946) embodied this continentalist discourse (ibid; 120).

Alternatively, Tsehloane Keto (1941–2004), the South-Africa born, former director of the African Heritage Studies Association, had proposed that the earliest constitution of

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4. By the phrase 'so-called continent', I mean to allude to the persuasive account by the geographer, Christian Grataloup (b. 1951), recalling how the geographical concept 'continent' had been historically constituted though a eurocentric discourse determined by colonialist interests and ideologies. (Grataloup, 2009)

knowledge about Africa had been created in Africa itself by its indigenous and ancient cultures, and that these should form the basis of contemporary scholarship, particularly within the continent and its diasporas. The indigenous knowledge Keto identified had been either recorded in literary texts—such as those of Egypt, Kush, Mali and Ethiopia—or else was transmitted in the material and discursive cultures of the continent's multitudinous peoples. Keto maintained that although, obviously, these indigenous cultures did not always use the precise, Latin term 'Africa', they nevertheless produced forms of knowledge that constituted their 'Africa-centred' understanding of the region (Keto, 1999; 177).

Then, preceding and separate from colonial-era, Eurocentric concepts of Africa, Keto also proposed an 'Asian-Centred' Africa that had first been constituted through historical, Asian contacts, such as those produced by Ancient Egypt's early influence in the Levant, as well as by the subsequent Persian conquest of Egypt, and the Arabic, Islamic conquest of Egypt and the Maghreb (ibid, 178). However, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (b. 1955), the Zimbabwe-born, former director of the ASA, noted also, that, starting in the mid-20th century, the formation of a discourse of Africa, which was constituted through African Studies scholarship, had become a globalized phenomenon—with academic programmes established in the universities of China, India and Japan, as well as in Russia, Brazil and other, dispersed centres (Zeleza, 2006; 344).

In view of the complex, intercontinental, discursive formation of African Studies, I also identified, as an alternative exhibitionary model to *Afro-Modern*, another major exhibition that mobilised specific concepts of Africa at a British art gallery. The large, touring, survey exhibition *Africa Remix: Art of a Continent* brought work by dozens of globally recognised, contemporary, African artists to London's Hayward Gallery in 2005. However, it resisted the ethnographic 'sub-Saharan' restrictions of a U.S. or U.K.-style African Studies paradigm. Instead, the lead curator Simon Njami (b. 1962) appeared to invoke the continent-based African Studies discourse by celebrating the Pan-Africanist inclusion of work by Mediterranean (that is, North African) artists under the over-arching sign of African art. In that respect, the catalogue cited the Tunis-born poet Abdelwahab Meddeb (1946–2014), who recalled that the term 'Africa' was used by the Romans to denote territory bounded by present day Tunisia. In this way, it was affirmed that a series of different concepts associated with the term 'Africa' could be projected, temporally, across thousands of years into the Mediterranean, ancient world, as well as spatially—from the Mediterranean southwards (Njami, 2005; 40).

There were several artistic parallels between *Africa Remix* and A*fro-Modern*: for example, both exhibitions included work by Mutu and Tracey Rose (b. 1974). There was also a similarly vast range of territories in *Africa Remix*: with South Africa, Egypt, Benin and Ghana represented,

respectively, by David Goldblatt (b. 1930), Ghada Amer (b. 1963), Meschac Gaba (b. 1961) and El Anatsui (b. 1944) (this being just a tiny sample of the more than 80 artists represented). Furthermore, works by Yinka Shonibare MBE (b. 1962) and Julie Mehretu (b. 1970) were included, despite Shonibare being born in and living mostly in the U.K.—whilst Mehretu had migrated to the U.S. aged seven.

Njami wrote, about curating *Africa Remix*, 'It is impossible to comprehend fully what Africa is' (Njami, 2005; 13). And certainly, by comparing these two large-scale exhibitions, both of which cited modes of African identity as a key object of discourse, I saw evidence of ruptures between their comprehension of 'what Africa is'. So, although both exhibitions were deeply researched, with meticulously curated and documented displays as well as prodigious printed texts, they also produced (through their selection of artists) certain, particular curatorial dissonances that signified other interesting parallels to the not quite overlapping 'grids' of classification (Foucault, 2001; xxi) at work in the African Studies and Africana Studies discourses.

In terms of its spatial and temporal extent, one form of knowing—Njami's—restricted its scope curatorially to contemporary artists who were either born in, or else had once lived, in 'continental' Africa. Consequently, Njami's model privileged a kind of porous, continental territoriality, irrespective of the European ancestry of Marlene Dumas (b. 1953), the English birthplace of Shonibare, or the U.S. residence of the New Yorker, Mutu—yet this model of Africa excluded artists descended from the pre-1870, black-Atlantic, emancipated Diaspora.

The other form of knowing, Barson's, had privileged an oceanic territoriality, also irrespective of ancestry, birthplace or residency. However, *Afro-Modern* excluded artists from North African, Atlantic-coast countries like Morocco, whilst including modernist white artists from northern Mediterranean countries like France and Italy. Furthermore, the show also included black artists, such as Mutu, from Indian Ocean countries like Kenya. Although Kenya had been colonised by Britain, (which was an Atlantic state), it had a far less marked historical connection with the pre-1870, black Atlantic Diaspora of West African countries (despite the election of Obama, whose father was Kenyan).

I thought that the fractures within and between these profoundly differing curatorial logics were emphasized by a third discourse, produced by the curators and writers Okui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu, who argued that their use of 'the term "African"… is capacious' when selecting artworks for their landmark, 2009 book, *Contemporary African Art since 1980:*

> *[R]ather than frame our assessment in ethnographic and ethnocentric terms, we attempt to map the field by attending to both the socio-political boundaries delineated by decolonization and the geo-political spaces mapped by diasporic and transnational movements. (Enwezor, 2009; 16)*

Consequently, by focussing their discursive attention on boundaries 'delineated by decolonization', *Contemporary African Art* seemed closely aligned to the full, continental, African Studies model of discourse appropriated by Njami in *Africa Remix*. And this meant that, by considering artists from 'spaces mapped by diasporic and transnational movements' (ibid), their model was also open to artists of later Diasporas, such as Chris Ofili (b. 1968), or Lynette Yiadom Boakye (b. 1977). They were both born in the UK and, never having made their homes in Africa, were the descendants of people who left their home continent in the 20th century. Furthermore, like Njami, who had categorised the exclusion of Islamic, or northern Africa from the 'Africa Studies' mode of discourse, as evidence of a revisionist 'pathology' (Njami, 2005; 13), Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu also regarded the concept of an impervious, Saharan boundary as 'superficial' (Enwezor, 2009; 13).

Nevertheless, Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu's definition of 'African', like that of Njami, also excluded the 'emancipated Diaspora' (artists descended from Africans forcibly deported to the Americas up until the late nineteenth century), that is to say, they seemed to reject the Africana Studies (or black-Atlantic) model which regarded the slave-trade era being as constitutive of a long-standing, trans-Atlantic, African world. However, it must be noted that neither Njami, nor Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu, had constructed their discursive African borders from a general lack of thematic interest in, or lack of social empathy with, artists of the pre-1870, emancipated, black-Atlantic diasporas. Njami, for his part, had written a biography of the African-American writer James Balwdin (1991, Njami); whilst Enwezor had long been an advocate for African-American artists, such as Lorna Simpson, on whose behalf he had argued forcefully, that 'ignoring the political conditions for the black subject in art is a self-defeating act of bad faith' (Enwezor, 2006; 130).

Perhaps, inevitably, by working through a mythic centring of either 'water', (the Atlantic) or of the 'earth' (Africa) in the *Afro-Modern* and *Africa Remix* exhibitions, the curatorial exclusions and inclusions of artistic identities, whilst in some respects overlapping, and complimenting one another, had in other respects produced radically divergent modes of proposing 'what Africa is'. Consequently, for the Njami/Enwezor model, the discursive border of Africa, although encompassing the Sahara and its Mediterranean coast, also terminated deep under the mid-nineteenth-century Atlantic, before surging into a diasporic mode after mid-twentieth-century decolonization. Conversely, in the Barson/Gilroy, black-Atlantic model, the necessary boundary appeared to exist in the Sahara, as though nothing of cultural significance from beyond the fringes of the Sahel had found its way onto either the slave ships or the many other kinds of voyage back and forth across the black Atlantic.

My observations did not propose that either of the three artworld concepts of Africa I have cited were 'wrong'. On the contrary, they each modified the discursive formation of Africana in the visual, curatorial and critical fields by trying to widen, deepen and open out a more inclusive understanding of what African, western, white, black, Arab, LBGT, female, Asian, male, Islamic, American, European, contemporary, diaspora or modern art might be. However, such curatorship and authorship, to function effectively, had required definite, models to work within. Consequently, those spatial, temporal and conceptual borders, as much as they represented certain limits, also seemed to invite my own enquiry to consider the possibilities for potential critical transgression. As Stuart Hall wrote:

> *I do not know of any identity which, in establishing what it is, does not, at the very same moment, implicitly declare what it is not, what has to be left out—excluded. (Hall, 1999; 40)*

Certainly, when Mudimbe excavated an archaeology of knowledge about 'the invention' of Africa (Mudimbe, 1990; L523) as an object of discursive formation in western Europe and its colonies, he found, from a Foucaultian perspective, two decisive 'epistemological ruptures' (Mudimbe, 1990; L625). As anticipated in the conceptual model, these occurred most starkly between the radically different ways that African artefacts and people were constituted in the knowledge/power systems of the Renaissance, with its epistemic order of Resemblance (ibid; L313); the subsequent Classical period's concern with Representation (L337); and then the Modernist era's interest in Origin (Foucault, 2002; 13). Mudimbe's psychologically framed conclusion, that the 'discovery of primitiveness was an ambiguous invention of a history incapable of facing its own double' (Mudimbe, 1990; L4789) suggested that such 'scientific' ruptures in identification, rooted as they were in conceptual revolutions that seemed to render old ways of thinking almost inconceivable, were crucial. Africa, just like any other discursive object (such as Europe, or 'the west') could not be, a fixed, unitary, stable object of any discourse, because the discursive formations that constituted them were not fixed, unitary or stable, but were 'dispersed' (Foucault, 2002; 41) across varying conditions of historical existence.

So, with regard to the methodologies of my inquiry and the concurrent need to understand the full multiplicity of artistic, Africana significations, neither the Africana-type model produced in the Gilroy/Barson 'Black Atlantic' approach, nor the model of the Njami/Enwezor 'continental African Studies' approach would entirely suffice. Given that Tate's collection of British art included works whose provenance dated from the 16th century, and whose conceptual networks traversed the globe in the wake of Britain's imperialist political-economy, then to bracket off any trans-Atlantic links until after 1870, when the slave trade to Cuba ceased (Thomas, 2006; 156)—as was characteristic of the African Studies models—would have impeded my research in one set of directions. Alternatively, and for

reasons that chimed with those of Njami and Enwezon, if I was to exclude the Sudan, Sahel and Maghreb, as was characteristic of Tate's *Afro-Modern*, 'Africana Studies' type curatorial discourse, then I would have impeded my research in another set of directions.

Therefore, I thought, that, in spatial and temporal terms, it was necessary for my enquiry to synthesize the expanded, continental African Studies model, with that of the black-Atlantic, Africana Studies model to produce an expansive, working concept of Africana that:

> *is not to be understood in ethnocentric, national, regional, or even continental terms… but as a network of positions, affiliations, strategies, and philosophies that represent the multiplicity of cultural traditions and archives available to and exploited consistently by… artists to shape their artistic positions… (Enwezor, 2009; 11)*

Despite my eluding the temporal borderlines which had agglomerated the artists of *Contemporary African Art*, I thought that Enwezor's suggestion of a network of positions seemed viable. I would need to guard against the danger of attempting to reconstitute a rhizomatically dispersed Africana as a kind of mythic, originative, essentialist object. Nevertheless, if I approached my work with transparency and specificity about my methods, then the kind of broad, rhizomatic and inclusive Africana, as suggested by Enwezor's remark, would enable my research to employ flexible investigative tools of artistic productivity.

The Tate Gallery, art and historicized Britishness

If unmasking fugitive signs of African identity in Tate's British art collection was, indeed, to be a strategy that facilitated critical practice, then as well as needing to effectively analyse and critique a discourse of fugitive Africana, I also needed to analyse what was meant by the term 'British art' as used in the phrase 'national collection of British art'. In particular, it seemed useful to focus on what was the criteria, if any, for assigning Britishness to artworks in the collection. Writing on the eve of the relaunch of the Tate Gallery at Millbank as 'Tate Britain' in 2000, the art academic Malcolm Quinn quipped that;

> *Only Orangemen, xenophobes and those who can't afford to dabble in cosmopolitanism put their Britishness before all else. For the rest of us, it's a useful handle when other definitions won't do. (Quinn, 2000)*

By this, Quinn signalled a suspicion that there was something intrinsically reactionary in the foregrounding of Britishness through the museum. However, the curator and academic Vicky Walsh observed in her study *Curating Britishness and Cultural Diversity* that, 'to this day, there is no finite working definition of British within Tate's practice' (Walsh, 2008; 14)—thereby stressing an ambiguity in the institution's relationship to Britishness. Three years after Walsh's study, the museum's *Disposal and Acquisition Policy* stated, under the heading 'British Art':

> *British art encompasses work by artists defined by their contribution to the history and development of British art rather than by nationality. Tate aims to hold the most significant collection of British art in the world, both in depth and in regard to the quality of individual works. (Tate Gallery, 2011; 1)*

But, self-evidently, this statement was tautological, as it meant, in effect, 'British art includes significant contributions to British art'—and, in confirmation of Walsh's observation, nowhere in the document was there an elaboration of what 'British art' might be. If the statements by both Quinn and Walsh were true, then it would seem that although Tate Britain was, in its naming of Self, putting national identity at its heart (according to Quinn), it did not explicitly define what this identity consisted of (according to Walsh). Did this suggest, in semiotic terms, that the term 'Britain' in the museum's name was a resonant, but uncannily empty signifier?

Such questions were addressed by Tate Britian's first Director Stephen Deuchar (b. 1957), who undertook the task of grappling with the exhibitionary split in the collection displays between, on the one hand, international-and-British modern art—for Tate Modern, Liverpool and St Ives—and, on the other hand, the exclusively *British* art on view at Millbank. For Deuchar;

> *[t]hough the concept of a national gallery of British art may not seem automatically modern, with its roots in a nationalist, centralist Victorian ethic scarcely in harmony with twenty-first century society, Tate Britian's agenda is determinedly contemporary. (Deuchar IN Myrone, 2000; 8)*

Deuchar's acknowledgement that the gallery seemed to be embracing an ethic rooted in imperial nationalism, was qualified by his assertion that, in response to 'many ethnic and social positions' the museum might take the opportunity to challenge ideas of national identity (ibid). And, writing in the same Tate Britian primer *Representing Britain: 1500–2000*, the curator Martin Myrone urged a strategy of 'accepting the full diversity of history as an opportunity to explore historical, personal and social meanings' (ibid; 21).

However, whilst Deuchar had asserted that Tate Britain would not engage in an 'extended investigation of the Britishness of British art (ibid), his successor in 2010, Penelope Curtis (b. 1961), launched precisely such a curatorial investigation through the critical vehicle of the museum's exhibition programme. One example, *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (2012), was unusual, as a ticketed show, for being almost entirely constituted from Tate's own, internal collection of British art, and therefore had few loans from other collections (Curtis, 2012; 9).

Curtis's motive was to explore, in the context of a political atmosphere of constant anxiety about immigration, how British art in Tate's national collection 'has been shaped by successive waves of migration' (Thomas, 2012; 1). Because one of her first decisions was, in *Migrations*, to 'look at the collection in relation to [Tate Britain's] troubling name' (Curtis, 2012; 8), her

remarks were worth considering in detail, as they outlined her definition of varying conditions of Britishness in the Tate's collection during the period of my research:

i. Some artworks were 'actually British': This was a logical inference from Curtis's statement that 'frequently' some art is '*not* actually British' (ibid, my emphasis). The inferred subcategory of 'actually' and the explicit subcategory of 'not actually' British added little to Walsh's view that there was no definition of Britishness, but suggested that a classificatory process had been undergone to produce a binary that inscribed categories of actually/not actually.

ii. Works that were 'not' already, inherently 'actually British', could become so by being transformed into British art, as was indicated in Curtis's use of the phrase 'making art British' (ibid). She listed three ways in which not-actually-British art could be made British: by custom, by convention or by adoption (ibid). This conventional Britishness had, then, been reserved primarily 'for the earlier part of the collection, where most of our paintings are by artists who came from overseas' (ibid). An example was provided via the three paintings in *Migrations* by Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), the Flemish, 17th-century, court portraitist to Charles I. However although, the national identity of these works was, by 2012, an institutionalized fact, it led me to interrogate further the stability, or cohesion, of the ascription of Britishness.

In the first place, a political entity called 'Britain' did not exist in the mid-17th century, when Van Dyke's paintings were created. So, did that mean all of Tate's 'British' artworks, which had been created before the 1707 Act of Union, had themselves been 'made British' in the sense of being given a retroactive, new, national identity when the formation of the Kingdom of Great Britain incorporated the two predecessor monarchies of England and Scotland? And so, what significance should I have attached to such obvious ruptures in the discontinuous, political history of the islands, which the Irish historian Brendan Bradshaw has described as the 'Atlantic archipelago' (Bradshaw, 2003; 1)?:

> *For history in its classical form, the discontinuous was both the given and unthinkable… it had to be rearranged, reduced, effaced in order to reveal the continuity of events. Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history. It has now become one of the basic elements of historical analysis. (Foucault, 1969; 9)*

Foucault had proposed that the requirement to produce historical continuities was the product of an archaic, discursive episteme that had been superseded by an analysis of revolutionary discontinuities. And given that an exploration of British art was a key part of my enquiry, it was worth asking about the extent and ways in which, the 'Britishness' in the national collection of British art was a temporal projection of a recent national mythology back across time—perhaps erasing, supplementing and assimilating, not simply Flemish, Dutch and

German, but also English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Africana artistic identities?

The survey of British art collected by Tate now sets the earliest date of artworks in the collection at 1500, although, when the museum was founded, it had been restricted to artists born after 1790 (Myrone, 2000; 7). However, in 1500, the concept of a British, national state as a unitary, political 'object of discourse' was still more than two centuries into the future. It was unlikely, for example, that Nicholas Hilliard, Elizabeth I's portraitist, would have thought of himself as primarily 'British' rather than English—although, much of Elizabeth's reign had centred around the renewed possibility of a joint, Anglo-Scottish monarchy under Mary Queen of Scots, and then, Mary's son, James I of England *and* IV of Scotland. In that sense, I wondered, had not English artists of the 16th century been 'adopted' into Britishness?

And, just as Mudimbe had written about a discursive invention of Africa (Mudimbe 1990), how much was the 'Britishness' on which the national collection was supposedly based, actually the product of something which Benedict Anderson (b. 1936), writing in 1983, described as an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006; 90)? Or, rather, how much was it a collection consisting of imaginative works made within an imagined community that could also be, as it were, unimagined? And, what of the real (but, eventually, unrealised) possibility that, even before the present enquiry was completed, 'the national collection of British art' might have been divided between, or, at least, reconceived by, two new nation states, one of them being an independent Kingdom of Scotland? Would works that had previously been 'made British' have had to be 'remade' as English, or else, as Scottish?

iii. Artworks could be considered British at the point of creation, when the artist was doing what Curtis described as (without qualification) 'making British art' (Curtis, 2012; 8). This seemed to be a refinement of the first inference of an 'actual' Britishness. For Curtis, and hence, for Tate, some art was inherently British when being made. Although it was not precisely put in these terms, it appeared that the question of whether or not works in the collection were 'actual', 'conventional', 'customary' or 'adopted' British art revolved around whether they were: a) made by (formerly) English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish or (latterly) British citizens and residents anywhere in the world, or else; b) made in Britain by artists of any other category of citizenship. The implication in Curtis's essay was that 'actual' British art—works which were created when artists were 'making British art'—was work made by British 'citizens' (or, previously, by subjects of the two, constituent, former kingdoms).

On the other hand, the art that received a conferred status of Britishness included works made by non-British citizens, either visiting, or else resident in, Britain. Yet one of the curatorial inflections of *Migrations*, was that, alongside artworks which were 'made British' by

actual immigrants—like Dutch Sir Peter Lely (1618–1680) and Indian Avinash Chandra (1931–1991)—there were also artworks by the black artists, Donald Rodney (1961–1998) and Sonia Boyce, which could be included properly in Curtis's, implied subcategory of 'actual British art'. This was not only because Rodney and Boyce's work was made in the U.K., but also, because they were not, themselves, immigrants. Quite unlike the migrants Lely and Chandra, the two black artists were born, educated and permanently resident in Britain (as well as being descended from generations of British-Caribbean subjects—and, in the case of Rodney, also dying in the country of his birth). Their position seemed analogous with that of Jewish artists, like David Bomberg (1890–1957) the son of Polish-Jewish migrants, whose work, despite his being born and raised in England, was considered, also, to belong in *Migrations*.

Consequently, the inclusion of black artist's works in *Migrations*, despite their being 'actually British', pointed to a continued, racialized anxiety about the identity and assimilation of African-Caribbean people who were not, themselves, actually migrants at all. Their work, as one of the *Migrations* curators, Paul Goodwin, put it, indicated the 'conflicts and possibilities of being simultaneously 'black' and 'British'' (Goodwin IN Carey-Thomas, 2012; 94). However, I understood this to have a double inflexion, referring not only to the content of their work, but also to the fact of being included in an exhibition about artists who 'have passed from one place to another' (Curtis, 2012; 9), when they were not themselves migrants.

Curtis maintained correctly that immigration was 'seen as especially topical' in 2012 (although I might ask when had it not been so?). Nevertheless, there was also evidence of a deep, historical echo, which indicated that in 1840, when the national collection of British art was founded, (in a specific, legal sense), the question of migrant and British identity was even then at its heart—although, in a very different manner. Then, Sir Francis Chantrey (1781–1841), a wealthy sculptor, bequeathed much of his fortune to 'the nation' in order to establish 'a public national collection of British fine art in painting and sculpture' (Chantrey IN MacColl, 1904; 60). This was the founding act of today's national collection of British art, although Chantrey hoped that the state would provide a suitable museum to display the work.

Chantrey's will was analysed by a future Keeper[5] of the museum, Dugald MacColl (1858–1948), and, in MacColl's republication of its clauses, it was clear that artwork purchased through the bequest was supposed to have been 'entirely executed within the shores of Great Britain' (ibid; 71). However, Chantrey's other clear instruction was that such work, whether

5. Keeper was the title of the Tate Gallery's first two chief administrators, subsequently changed to Director.

made in the past, present or future, might be executed by 'artists *of any nation*, provided such artists shall have actually resided in Great Britain during the execution and completing [sic] of such works' (ibid; 70) [my emphasis]. Thus, for Chantrey it was unambiguous: for the national collection, any work made in Britain could be legitimately categorised as British (without any distinction, as was later suggested by Curtis, of adoption, actuality, custom or convention).

However, I wondered whether the initial, founding emphasis on questions of identity was also evidence of the kind of 19th century 'imperial anxiety' identified by the literary historian Francesco Crocco (2008; 243), and which, perhaps, corresponded to philosophical, or psychological categories of Self, Same and Other (Mudimbe, 1990; L914)? Did Chantrey, in effect, propose the *assimilation* of the Other (artists of any nation) into Self (Britain) to produce the Same (British art)? Whatever the case for Chantrey himself, the art critic Jean Fisher (b. 1962) thought that the urge:

> *to privilege homogeneity through assimilation is symptomatic of western philosophy's desire for equivalence between signified and signifier—a transcendental truth. (Fisher 1991; L5687)*

By the time I started this project, Tate was reworking its updated version of the original Chantrey stipulation, in which, the path of entry for works into the national collection of British art, whilst not strictly defined, did not depend on citizenship, or even a British place of manufacture. Geographer Andy Morris had proposed that the Tate:

> *think in terms of various forms of Britishness. Furthermore, these various forms of Britishness relate to various time-spaces; they may be co-present but they are also the product of different 'strands' of place-based belonging. (Morris, 2002; 98)*

My observation was that, with regard to the accession of works into the collection, an understanding that there were 'various forms of Britishness' has been the policy (at least officially), as stated, or practiced, through curatorial management from Chantrey to Curtis.

However, in practice there appeared to be demonstrable differences between how white and black 'migrant' artists' British work was collected. For example, *Love Locked Out* (1890) by Anna Lea Merritt (1844–1930), a white, American-born, female painter, was accessioned to the national collection of British art through the Chantrey bequest in 1890 (Speilman, 1895; 22). This was seven years before the Tate Gallery even opened, whereas Tate had been open for ninety years before the museum acquired the work of any British-Africana artist (and that was almost one hundred years since the collection of a white, female 'migrant' artist's work). Consequently, when, in 1987, artworks by Frank Bowling R.A. (b. 1936) and Sonia Boyce M.B.E., R.A., were first collected, it represented a stark rupture; an event of radical discontinuity in an otherwise implicitly racialized, historical narrative of white, artistic

Britishness that had been constituted by the Tate's prior collecting practice[6].

Was the museum's extended belatedness caused by a lack of what the acquisitions policy termed 'quality' in the work of black artists prior to 1987? In that respect, it was worth recalling that, on the contrary, the earliest Africana-British artist's work collected by Tate to date had been created in 1936 by the modernist Jamaican-born sculptor Ronald Moody (1900–1984). However, *Johanaan* (1936) was not accessioned until 1992, eight years after his death (Brett, 2003), which meant that because Moody had achieved some success in the 1930s and 1950s (ibid), it was necessary to consider the possible significance of the fifty-six-year delay. One method was to consider the narrative of black British acquisitions in relation to feminist critiques of Tate's acquisition practice, which had also questioned how the museum decided what art was 'significant'. For example, in 2003, Tate published a book by the art historian Alicia Foster called *Tate's Women Artists,* in which she observed that the history of black women's art in Britain had been 'long overlooked' (Foster, 2003; 185). In a subsequent article for the *The Guardian* newspaper, Foster revealed that 11% of the artists (British and international) with work in Tate's collection were women (Foster, 2004). Foster attributed this 'imbalance in our art collections… [to] …past discrimination against women… [as well as] … continuing difficulties rewarding women's work today (ibid).

However, the work of Moody's more senior peer—the white, British, female, painter Gwen John (1876–1939)—first entered the national collection in 1917, twenty years before she died (Jenkins, 2004; 206). Similarly, the early accession of work by the white, female, 'migrant' artist Merritt, had been 40 years before she died. Consequently, it seemed that prior to the historical rupture of the Bowling/Boyce accessions in 1987, Tate's identification of what was considered to be a 'significant contribution to British art' had correlated strongly to a racialized difference. Although white, female artists seemed to have faced what Foster termed 'discrimination', their work, whether by 'migrants' (like Merritt), or by 'actually British' artists (like John) had seemed to enter the national collection with greater ease than that of their Africana peers, whether or not the latter were male or female, migrant or 'actually British'.

The historical, Africana rupture in Tate's own practice, produced by the accession of the Boyce and Bowling works, was not acknowledged directly in the text of the *Migrations* catalogue. Although Leyla Fakhr (b. 1979) and Goodwin contributed essays that critiqued racial 'segregation' and 'exclusion' in general, the catalogue as a whole stopped short of

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6. In my 2013 installation, *Learning Zone*, and its accompanying exhibition documentation, I showed that, during the twenty-six years since 1987, the art of a further 13 or 14 British-Africana artists were also added to the Tate's overall, British and international collection—which included works by approximately 3,500 artists.

interrogating Tate's practice itself (ibid 72, 93). Did this intriguing omission suggest that the museum found it difficult to acknowledge it had not seamlessly, always embraced the work of black 'migrant' (or non-migrant) artists? However, even whilst *Migrations* was underway, the implicit, mythic narrative of museological, racial concord was challenged by the art historian Eddie Chambers (b. 1960). Chambers, in his 2012 book *Things Done Change: The Cultural Politics of Recent Black Artists in Britain,* had claimed that (at least, until 1987):

> *in the minds of many, the Tate was characterized, perhaps more than anything else, as an institution from which Black artists were perpetually excluded. (Chambers, 2012; 181)*

And, in 2013, writing in *Post-critical Museology: Theory and Practice in the Art Museum,* the art academics Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh had suggested that the acquisition of Bowling's 1984 painting *Spreadout Ron Kitaj* arose only because during the 1980s Tate been 'forced to take note of the range and quality of the artistic and critical interventions with which they were surrounded' (Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh, 2013; 109). In addition, they asserted that Tate's continued recognition of a significant contribution to British Art by Africana artists was 'never solely a political or even intellectual process' but was, instead, dependent upon those artist's connecting with 'patrons, dealers, gallerists and collectors' in a socio-economic complex of 'international curatorial networks' (ibid; 118).

Evidently, with regard to the race and gender of artists, the identification of what was a significant British artwork had proved to be problematic for the museum (unless it was assumed that artworks by whites and men consistently made a disproportionately superior contribution to British art). Nevertheless, for the purposes of my inquiry, and given the various, authoritative, institutional statements about the matter, I decided that the identification of which of Tate's artworks were considered as British did not appear to present a fundamental, strategic obstacle—even though the museum held a single, unitary collection of British and Modern International art (Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh, 2013; 43). Consequently, in order to develop a critical, dialogic, creative relationship with any particular artwork in the collection, my research methodology needed to take account of appropriate provenance information, particularly about the place of production. The nationality of the artist would be of secondary importance, only to be taken into account if the work was not made entirely 'within the shores of Great Britain'. Although, even then, as I discovered, "where there's a will…there's a way"—and, perhaps, any artwork could be 'made British'.

Lubaina Himid and Guy Debord: case studies in Africana and Détournement

This section considers the critical relevance of two artists to the practice elements of my research: Lubaina Himid (b. 1954), a Tanzanian-born, British-based painter who incorporated canonical artwork into her critical postcoloniality and Frenchman Guy Debord, the Situationist who advocated that artists critique art and society using a strategy of 'détournement'.

Lubaina Himid's Revenge

Lubaina Himid, whose practice had been sustained since the early 1980s, was one of Britain's most consistent, critically engaged, contemporary artists. A concern with the historicity of art practice was central to her work, in which textual interventions such as letter writing played a role. In *Shades of Black* (Bailey, 2005) she wrote, of artists in the 1980s Black Art Movement:

> *Having exhibitions in establishment venues is still rare, underfunded, and kept very quietly away from press scrutiny. Being historicized in monographs is almost unheard of. Having a multiplicity of histories should have been a strength, but we left it to people who did not really understand what it is to make art or to speak about it. We left it to those that made the stuff and remained ignorant about what the real agenda of the dominant institutions might be. (Himid IN Bailey, 2005; 44)*

Despite using the pronoun 'we', Himid, in this instance, could not in fact have been speaking primarily about a sense of grievance for her own career. By the standards of most professional fine artists, she had achieved a significant degree of success: the Tate Gallery had included her work in several exhibitions, including a solo show at Tate St Ives (*Plan B* in 1999). Then, in 2011, Tate Britain presented *Thin Black Line(s)* which was a reinterpretation of the 1985 group show she curated at the prestigious ICA, *The Thin Black Line*. Her work was held and displayed in the collections of Tate and other prominent institutions, and she had occupied senior teaching positions in Britain's art academy. Therefore, her remarks about lack of recognition could be read, not as personal bitterness, but as sharing her concern that British, black artists in general—and more particularly, black women artists—had seemed to face longstanding marginalisation by what she characterized as the 'dominant institutions'.

Indeed, from early in her career, taking painting as her main, exhibitionary practice, Himid's work had posited herself as an historical commentator with an interest in the identity politics of race, gender, sexual orientation and postcolonial diaspora. Tate's website said that:

> *All her work, however, addresses issues of painting and history, mourning such historical injustices as slavery while celebrating the pleasures of her own life and friendships and the sensuality of paint. (Tate, undated)*

In fact, in some ways, I thought that Himid's work had a thematic structure that was close to my own. However, her figurative painting had a consistent materiality characterized by its rapid, loose brushwork, vigorous texture, opacity, extensive palette and 'flat' modelling.

Although this more Expressionistic style was true of my work *Elizabeth Rex Lives*, it had not been characteristic of my practice in general, which had tended to be less Expressionistic, and closer in method to the minutely observed 'realistic' detail of the portrait sculpture of Africa's Ife kingdom, and to post-Renaissance painting produced in Europe before the Impressionists. Himid, though had voiced hostility to 'self indulgent techniques' of Classical painting styles (Himid IN Pollock, 1999; 176), which suggested a critical distance from my own practice: I regarded my attentiveness to the delicate intricacies of my sitters' physical being as a form of sympathetic acknowledgement of their presence rather than being self-indulgent.

Himid's paintings were often made on large, free-standing, board cut-outs, as well as rectangular, wall-based, canvas supports. In 1992, she exhibited a series of paintings called *Revenge: a Masque in Five Tableaux*, at the Rochdale Art Gallery and the Southbank Centre in London, which incorporated the work of canonical, western artists into her own tableaux—positioning her Africana figures into a dialogic relationship with the earlier paintings (Himid, 1992; 31). For example, *Between the Two My Heart is Balanced* (Himid, 1991) (fig. i.1.) appropriated key imagery from a work about heroism, romance and desire by James Tissot, painted in 1877 and called *Portsmouth Dockyard* (fig. i.2).

Fig. i.1: Himid, L., (1991) 'Between the Two My Heart is Balanced'. Acrylic paint on canvas. 1218mm x 1524mm

Fig. i.2: Tissot, J. (1877) 'Portsmouth Dockyard'. Oil paints on canvas.

Tate's website said of the Tissot work that, because a previous, similarly themed painting *The Thames* (Tissot 1876) caused a moral scandal at the Royal Academy, *Portsmouth Dockyard* was 'exhibited as a corrective' (Tate, 2007). Himid's work, however, was exhibited as yet a further 'corrective' because, as Griselda Pollock articulated:

> *…that harbour was home to the British navy. The male figure is a soldier. It is the embodiment of the military force that secured the Empire that Lubaina Himid expels from her painting, replacing him with the pile of maps and charts. These refer to [imperial and colonial conquest] and forms of knowledge—the epistemic violence. (Pollock, 1999; 175)*

Himid's *Between the Two My Heart is Balanced* then, acted as a kind of détournement of Tissot's apparent celebration of British sea power—in which, his patriarchal redcoat seemed emblematic of heterosexual 'conquest' as the corollary of, and reward for, imperial violence. Hers, on the other hand was:

> *…a musing on what would happen if black women got together and started to try and destroy maps and charts—to undo what has been done. (Himid 2001 IN Rice, 2003; 75)*

Alan Rice, writing about the museum Director Stephen Deuchar's opening rehang for Tate Britain believed that, by showing Himid's painting (which entered the collection in 1995) but failing to display it in juxtaposition to works symbolic of slavery, Tate missed an opportunity to constitute a discourse of challenge to a colonialist normative (Rice, 2003; 75). However, in the 2012 *Migrations* show, not only did the Tissot painting and Himid's work share the same exhibition space, but both were featured, side-by-side, in a montage on the exhibition banners and publicity (Tate, 2012)—which suggested to me that, although 'the past' is always that which cannot be undone, in curatorial terms at least, Himid got her 'revenge'.

In terms of her commitment to celebratory painting and her willingness to critique canonical artworks from a position of post-feminist, proletarian and Africana resistance, Himid's practice could be regarded as being both a forerunner and, latterly, contemporaneous to mine. I attended the opening evening of *The Thin Black Line* in 1985 and was pleased to see some of those works, which had been formative in my development as a young artist, shown again at Tate Britain under her joint curatorship with Paul Goodwin in 2011's *Thin Black Line(s).*[7]

In what ways then, did my project of 'unmasking Africana' constitute an original contribution in the light of Himid's longstanding appropriationist practice? Certainly, neither I nor Himid were the first artists to appropriate other practitioner's imagery in order to use it in a different, even critical manner. That has been a standard script the world over, the bread-and-butter of critical collage, montage, satire, parody, pastiche and avant-garde iconoclasm. Thus, in *Picasso: His life and Work* the art historian Sir Roland Penrose CBE (1900–1984) wrote of how Picasso went through a so-called 'Negro period', which was 'held by most critics to be derived from Ivory Coast masks' (1981; 137); and, in *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s*, John Welchman recalled how the Korean-born, American artist Cody Choi (b. 1961):

> *[musters] ironic armament… to wage surrogate war with the titanic period icons of Western visual culture—classical Greek sculpture, Michelangelo, Auguste Rodin. (Welchman, 2001; 245)*

Obviously, in relation to Himid's *Between the Two, My Heart is Balanced,* I did not think that I would be the first, or only, artist to interrogate the possibility of Africana interpretations for artworks in Tate's British collection. Nevertheless, what gave my research a unique specificity in relation to Himid's work, and to UK practitioners with comparable interests—such as Yinka Shonibare MBE, Mary Evans, Faisal Abdu'Allah (b. 1969), Sonia Boyce or Keith Piper — was my systematic concentration of a discursive and studio interrogation into the specific interplay of Britishness and fugitive Africana in the context of a national collection founded on notions of Britishness. Therefore, I thought my enquiry was a discursive and practical intensification of individual forays that had already been made in a wider artistic arena.

In addition, I thought that my description of a specific 'unmasking' methodology and my naming of a class of practice as 'unmasking Africana' gathered together multiple, hitherto individualised artistic purposes and attributed a more specific set of artistic procedures than was claimed under the generalising and less precise labels of postcoloniality, diasporic art, black, African, post-black art, appropriation, or détournement. Accordingly, my research,

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7. If identity politics played any role in the Tate's Turner Prize nominations, then the 2012 inclusion, for the first time, of a black, female painter—Lynette Yiadom Boakye—might have been, arguably, one result of Himid's dogged, collective struggle to erase any institutional bias against black women's practice.

'unmasking Africana', hypothesized the existence of a specific, methodological approach to the appropriation of artworks with regard to postcoloniality, diaspora, Africana, blackness and transnationalism. It tried to describe systematic rules and aims of that specific approach, as it might have been conducted by artists, and suggested that Unmasked Africana was an as yet unnamed and, hence, little recognised, or understood, art-historical class of practice.

Guy Debord and Détournement

Guy Debord, (as most 1980s, London art students might have been expected to know), was a founding member, in 1957, of the influential, Situationist International—a group of radical intellectuals, including artists, poets and filmmakers, whose critical focus was on cultural production and consumption. In his seminal, 1967 text *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord denounced western consumerism, as well as Soviet repression and the conservative aspirations of, 'underdeveloped regions' (meaning, former colonies) (Debord, 1984; 37). All were manifestations of 'the spectacle', a political, economic, and especially, cultural process, by which capitalism presented itself as the natural, normalized and ideal condition of life:

> *Behind the glitter of the spectacle's distractions, modern society lies in thrall to the global domination of a banalizing trend that also dominates it at each point where the most advanced forms of commodity consumption have seemingly broadened the panoply of roles and objects available to choose from. (Debord, 1984; 38)*

For Debord, spectacular, commodified distractions such as film, sport, arts and entertainment all orchestrated a celebration of capitalism through such agents as 'the star'. Western abundance was not an authentic fulfilment of human potential but, simply, the institutionalization of alienation—forestalling, yet ultimately provoking, its own demise in a 'revolutionary class struggle' (Debord, 1984; 143). Situationists proposed that critical thinkers, particularly artists, must appropriate 'spectacular' expressions of bourgeois culture, and then infuse them with critical meaning, whilst retaining a recognisable element of the object's prior usage. However, Situationist appropriation, which the group called 'détournement', was not merely erudite quotation:

> *Détournement is the antithesis of quotation… it is the fluid language of anti-ideology. It occurs within a type of communication aware of its inability to enshrine any inherent and definitive certainty… its internal coherence and its adequacy in respect of the practically possible are what validate the ancient kernel of truth it restores. Détournement founds its cause on nothing but its own truth as critique at work in the present. (Debord, 1984; 146)*

Situationist theories of détournement were hostile to the commodification of art, notions of 'plastic beauty' (Debord IN Mcdonough, 2004; 165) and bourgeois careerism: 'Critical in its content, such art must also be critical of itself in its very form' (ibid; 164). They regarded themselves as heirs to the criticality of the surrealists and dada-ists, and as the vibrant stream of Marxist opposition. However, from this rather dour description, it should not be thought

that détournement, or other Situationist interventions, such as the dérive, were sullen protests: parody, sarcasm, wit, satire and ridicule were considered as a suitable element of their appeal.

In the half-century since the Situationists' emergence, détournement had continued to be a strategy that was cited by artists, as well as by art writers and theorists. For example, one of the standard, art-college text books, *Art in Theory: 1900–2000—An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Harrison, 1992–2003) by Charles Harrison (1942–2009) and Paul Wood, featured a text by Debord (ibid; 701), as well as an essay by his fellow Situationist Asger Jorn (1914–1973) called *Detourned Painting* (ibid; 707). However, when in 2003 Martin Herbert wrote, of an installation at London's prestigious White Cube gallery by David Hammons, that he produced 'a funky detournement of magmatic Modernist abstraction' (Herbert, 2003), it was a relatively rare attempt to situate a black artist's appropriationist practice in a dialectical relationship to an art movement beyond the discursive borders of the postcolonial, or 'post-black'.[8]

That is not to say that Africana, black (or 'post-black') artists required legitimization from a perceived proximity to white, French theorists in order to produce the effectiveness of their own work—rather it is to reiterate, as Sonia Boyce and Rasheed Araeen (b. 1935) had noted in texts such as *Shades of Black* (Bailey, 2005) and *The Other Story* (Araeen, 1989), that Africana artistic practices had often seemed to exist in a potential dialogic relationship to other modernist (or postmodernist) artistic identities, but that such hypothetical (or real) relationships, despite producing commonalities of technique or method, had tended to escape the attention of art critics and art historians[9].

Détournement then, had been frequently associated with the (predominantly white) punk aesthetic of the mid-to-late 1970s (not long after the publication of the *Society of the Spectacle*) —with the Sex Pistols' record, *God Save the Queen* (Sex Pistols, 1977) and its détourned cover amongst the more obvious examples, as had been observed by numerous commentators (Sabin, 2002; 21/Brown, 2011; 266/Wanono IN Navas, 2014;390). Nevertheless, I thought it was noteworthy to observe that several of the key British texts exploring critical politically engaged art by Africana artists—such as, for example, Gen Doy's *Black Visual Culture: modernity and post-modernity* (1999)—did not mention détournement. Indeed, neither did Alan

8. 'Post-black' art was a term used by curator Thelma Golden in response to work produced by the African-American artists she selected for the 2001, *Freestyle* exhibition at the Harlem Studio Museum. (Golden, 2001; 14)
9. Perhaps the clearest expression of this modernist lacunae was made by the acerbic white British art critic Brian Sewell (1931–2015). Writing a *Sunday Times* review of Araeen's 1989 group exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian artists in postwar Britain*, Sewell had claimed that 'the work of afro-asian artists in the west is no more than a curiosity, not yet worth even a footnote in any history of 20th century western art' (Sewell, 1989 IN Edwards, 1999; 267). Sewell's defensiveness failed to address seriously the obvious retort that the lack of 'footnotes' he identified might have constituted a problem with the intellectual 'worth' of white, western, art historians, rather than the worth of afro-asian artists's work.

Rice in *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (2003), Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), *Shades of Black* (Bailey, 2005) or *Afro-Modern* (Barson, 2010). In particular, it seemed interesting that no connection was made (even if only by analogy) between Situationist détournement and comparable Africana political-appropriationist practices, such as Himid's *Between the Two My Heart is Balanced.*

An example of how the work of British-Africana artists tended to be contextualised in a manner different to their white peers was embodied by comparing the Tate's online text about Himid with its text about the 'Young British Artist'[10] Sarah Lucas (b. 1962). For Lucas, Tate reproduced a text from the website *Grove Art Online* by the art historian John-Paul Stonard, stating that her work was 'given critical viability' by 'Situationism [sic] and Surrealism[11]', and 'has elicited comparisons with Francis Bacon and Damien Hirst' (Stonard, 2000). Lucas, then, was situated by the museum's online curatorial text in historical proximity to two specific art movements and two specific artists. By contrast, Tate's online biography of Himid mentioned vaguely only a relationship to 'abstract modernism' (lower case 'l', lower case 'm') and an equally vague 'consciously black' art. By comparison with Lucas, the Himid text (reproduced from an anonymous *Grove Art Online* article) mentioned no other artists or historical Art Movements (capital 'A' capital 'M')—notwithstanding the fact that Himid's work in Tate's collection was figurative and representational, rather than purely 'abstract'.

Himid, it seemed, had been cast adrift and alone in an unmoored art-historical boat, defined by the Tate/Grove text only as 'consciously black'. Yet, when Alan Rice wrote about Himid's '*Between the two*…' that she was:

> *not afraid to use imperial imagery against itself, to destabilize its seemingly hegemonic meanings [...] (Rice, 2003; 76)*

it was almost as though he had paraphrased from a Situationist pamphlet: citing the political context of British imperialism, and suggesting that Himid had appropriated Tissot's imagery as a form of artistic, political opposition—but without mentioning détournement as an art historical comparator. (Admittedly, Rice was predominantly an English professor rather than an art historian—unlike Stonard, who had worked with the Courtauld Institute.)

Conversely, when considering Stonard's claim that Lucas's practice drew its 'critical viability'

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10. Sarah Lucas's work was exhibited in the series of six, high-profile shows titled 'Young British Artists' organised by the art collector and dealer, Charles Saatchi, (b. 1943) at his London gallery in the early 1990s.
11. Debord's biographer, Anselm Jappe, recalled that the Situationists 'firmly rejected from the outset' the stultifying connotations of the term 'Situationism' and claimed that its use was symptomatic of contemporary 'incomprehension' about the group, and of the inappropriate use of their concepts (Jappe, 1999; 2).

from 'Situationism', I noted that Anselm Jappe, Debord's biographer, was clear that the France-based group regarded the free market as:

> *an economy that has become independent and in so doing subjugated human life. This is a consequence of the triumph of the commodity […] (Jappe, 1999; 11)*

However, Lucas, far from regarding the free market as 'subjugating human life' had, from the outset of her career, courted conspicuous patronage from Charles Saatchi—the successful advertising agent for Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberal Conservative Party—whose purchase of her early work financed her opening of a shop (Lucas, 2007; Kent, 2004; Malik, 2009). This suggested her practice was not averse to the kind of commodification that the ardently anti-capitalist Situationists rejected. Consequently, it seemed ironic that Lucas's highly commercialized practice was said to derive 'critical viability' from the Situationists, whilst, on the other hand, the 'anti-imperialist' Himid was not recognised as having such an affinity—even though her work had been described in terms strongly reminiscent of détournement.

My thought then, was not that general strategies of critical appropriation used by black artists, or even 'unmasking' in particular, were derived from détournement, or claimed legitimacy from it. Critical appropriation in general—reversing, erasing or confusing meaning—could not, in truth, be claimed as the copyright of one group of French intellectuals (especially, a group hostile to the very notion of intellectual 'property'). And also, both Himid's and Hammons' professionalism, their struggles for inclusion rather than exclusion—to have their work bought, displayed institutionally and discussed—pointed to significant differences between their interests as members of marginalized, racialized populations, and the interests of the generally bourgeois, white, Situationists, including with regard to détournement.

What I did think though, was that unmasking Africana, as a form of critical enquiry—a way of looking, thinking and making—had, arguably, a theoretical affinity with détournement and particularly with its interest in appropriating and critiquing complacent assumptions and hegemonic meanings that had been invested in many canonical artworks. For my own practice, one important difference with détournement was my reluctance to embrace 'plagiarism', which Debord regarded as an essential element of any critical rejection of commodification (Debord, 1984; 145). That is not to say that an unmasking methodology should avoid appropriating, far from it—unmasked Africana should appropriate as much as possible, citing contemporary as well as modern and historical artworks. It was simply that, in a highly litigious culture, it might seem irresponsible strategically to encourage critical artists to be sued, bankrupted and possibly imprisoned (particularly, if they were financially vulnerable or subject to already prevalent institutional bias). If this meant that unmasking Africana was not

yet a Situationist incitement to defend 'the barricades', then so be it …as I thought that I had nothing to prove in that respect.

Summary of the Introduction

I began by considering Mudimbe's theory that the constitution of knowledge 'about' Africa and Africana was a historical instance of discursive formation, as described by Foucault.

I then proposed that two, major, group exhibitions and one, landmark, survey book could be interpreted as instances of the discursive formation of Africana and Africa, as had been prefigured in the academic systems embodied by Africana Studies and African Studies. I concluded by proposing that my working concept of Africana would synthesize the temporal and spatial scope of the two models I had analysed.

I analysed how the Tate Gallery, through the national collection of British art, had historically functioned to produce concepts of Britishness that were constituted by varying forms of artistic subjectivity, particularly with regard to migration, race, residence and nationality.

Finally, I considered two artists as case studies: Lubaina Himid, whose painting *Between the Two My Heart is Balanced* seemed to function as an anti-imperialist, anti-sexist, détournement of Tate's British collection artwork *Portsmouth Dockyard* by James Tissot; and also Guy Debord, whose practice and description of détournement informed his critical engagement. I proposed unmasking Africana as a methodology that produced a specific form of appropriative criticality.

SECTION 1: METHODOLOGIES

I have divided Section 1 of this thesis, 'Methodologies' into four chapters, each of which documents an investigation into specific aspects of my methodological strategy. In those four chapters, I set out, in detail, the research parameters I employed in order to answer the specific questions that arose from my research hypothesis and its problematics. The first chapter, outlines, in brief, my general, methodological concepts and processes with regard to fugitive Africana and its unmasking. Then in Chapter 2, I detail the visual, observational methods used for my research into artworks in Tate's collection. In Chapter 3, I consider why painting was a key methodology, which I regarded as both necessary and sufficient for making new, unmasking artworks, and in Chapter 4, I analyse how critical methodologies of reading visual artworks and reading about artwork, in the context of museums and canonical art history, informed my process. Then, in Section 2, which considers the practical application of these methodologies in my studio practice, my subsequent chapters document how and why I produced new 'unmasked Africana' artworks in the context of this research project.

CHAPTER 1: MODES OF AFRICANA AND PHASES OF THE UNMASKING PROCESS

Introduction

In this chapter, I propose a critical, reflexive, interdisciplinary approach to my research, and also describe a methodological relationship between artworks and what I identified as different modes of artistic Africana. Then I set out, in brief, the methodological phases of the unmasking process: critical reading, observation, appropriation/synthesis and reflection. This chapter provides a schematic outline to the general process of unmasking fugitive Africana, and should function as a concise reference point for the subsequent chapters in Section 1, dealing with methodologies, as well as in Section 2, which deals with my studio practice.

1.1 Does unmasking Tate's fugitive Africana facilitate critical practice?

The central hypothesis for my overall research project was that: unmasking fugitive signs of Africana in Tate's British art collection facilitates critical practice. The problem to be solved, therefore, was how to produce a critical practice that embodied, and was facilitated by, an unmasking process. Writing about Himid's work, Griselda Pollock had articulated a kind of critical practice as:

> *creating narratives and histories for those erased by both their enslavement and murder and their mythic assimilation as muted other into imperial narratives and colonial art histories, [which] may, paradoxically, find in the artistic icons of the Western story and their modernist aesthetic tools the very materials with which to articulate an inscription of a historically resistant subjectivity. (Pollock, 173; 1999)*

I regarded Pollock's recognition of a 'historically resistant subjectivity' that proposed to undo the art-historical erasures of empire as corresponding to my conception of a critical art practice. This meant that my proposed 'unmasking' artworks needed to foreground the contextual paradigm of fugitive Africana (or, the 'muted other') (ibid) if they were to achieve a viable sense of critical revelation. Alternatively, if, on reflection, my methods did unmask fugitive Africana but, I judged my practice to be 'complacent', (that is, if criticality was not facilitated), then, perhaps, other, more 'resistant' methods would need to be evaluated.

This challenge, in which I would attempt to work out the practical implications of my hypothesis, meant that my methodology was reflexive: I did not assume from the outset, either that unmasking fugitive Africana in Tate's British collection was possible or, that it would necessarily produce a critical practice, or that methods used in a specific case would necessarily be applicable to other instances. Such reflexiveness meant I needed to be open to the prospect of making decisions informed by my investigation as it unfolded. And so, in order to facilitate such inquiring openness, my process was, as the German art theorist Kathrin Busch suggested in her paper *Artistic Research and the Poetics of Knowledge:*

> *characterized by an interdisciplinary procedural method, in which artworks are created within a broader, theoretically informed framework. (Busch, 2009)*

Busch's advocacy of a research practice that invests in disciplines beyond those identified with the technical considerations of an artist's studio was exemplified by the methodology of this project, which was produced using a 'theoretically informed framework' of art history, critical theory and critical museology, as well as of drawing, painting, photography, digital design and writing. Consequently, in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of Section 1, I have given detailed, separate consideration to the practical and theoretical implications of these disciplines, and how they have each had specific relevance to the methodology of unmasking Africana.

Although earlier, in my Introduction, I indicated how my thinking about Africana and British artistic identities was constituted, I did not assume in advance what form fugitive Africana in Tate's collection might take, that is to say, I did not assume what it was that I would see, or not see, when I began to investigate hidden or little known relationships to Africana in the museum's artworks, or how I might produce critically engaging artwork in response to what I found. However, the British artist and writer Rebecca Fortnum (b. 1963), reflecting on the American educator Rudolph Arnheim's (1904–2007) exploration of perception and practice in *Visual thinking* (1969), proposed that there was an inherent:

> *impossibility of separating seeing from thinking. Thinking is part of looking: we choose what it is we look at and understand that what we see is often not what is (Fortnum, 2005; 5)*

The idea that seeing and thinking were entwined seemed to be an apt identification of the particular methodological relevance of my painting practice, especially with its attentiveness to the perception of likenesses and resemblances in the field of portraiture. Because of my prior experience and technical facilities, it was likely that painting, as a method of artistic production, would form an important part of my studio-based research process and, consequently, I have devoted Chapter 3 to considering the methodological implications of my painting practice.[12] However, there was also the possibility that painting would not be the only fruitful method and that other forms of what the writer Sarat Maharaj (b. 1951) described as 'thinking through the visual' (2009) would need to be embraced.

1.2 Modes of Africana in artworks: fugitive, masked, unmasking and unmasked

As I have stated, for the purpose of this project I proposed four working concepts each of

12. In part, my investment in painting informed my decision to chose the term 'fugitive' in the phrase 'fugitive Africana'—as a reference to those painter's pigments which fade when exposed to light. One example of this painterly use of 'fugitive' as a technical term occurs in '*The Artist's Handbook*' by the British painter Philip Seymour, where he describes 'dutch pink' as a 'fugitive' pigment. (2003; 67)

which articulated how a given artwork might embody hidden, 'muted' or little known links to Africana. The terms employed were 'fugitive Africana', 'masked Africana', 'unmasking Africana' and 'unmasked Africana' and I shall address each in turn.

The first mode, which I termed 'fugitive Africana', was constituted by what I regarded as a 'condition of existence' (Hall, 2005; 163) of specific, visual artworks. My use of the concept 'condition of existence' to describe how fugitive Africana might be embodied by an artwork drew upon the thinking of Stuart Hall in his 1980 essay *encoding/decoding* (which reworked ideas he first published in 1973). Hall focussed on television broadcasts, but I thought his Marxian approach to the production of meanings was relevant. He described the signifying 'object' as constituted by a process which:

> *requires, at the production end, its material instruments—its "means"—as well as its own sets of social (production) relations—the organization and combination of practices within media apparatuses. (Hall, 2005; 163)*

The key term here was 'requires'—by which, Hall meant that particular conditions ('material means' and 'social relations') were necessary. That is to say they were 'required' historically in order for the broadcast production to exist. Many of these necessary conditions were not ordinarily or permanently discernible by viewers—such as, for instance, the body of the camera operator or the solidity of the camera lens itself—but, this invisibility of those material conditions of existence also applied to the use by broadcasters of specific discursive codes and social relations, which Hall was concerned with. From my perspective, artworks, like television programmes, could also be regarded as as signifying objects that were constituted by material means and social relations that were not always apparent.

Therefore, if a British artwork was produced under specific conditions of existence that included specific iconological links to Africa, but those links were not readily apparent (despite being embodied by the existence of the artwork) then such links were 'fugitive'—meaning they constituted Africana that seemed to evade perception. I had initially used the term 'fugitive' to describe signs that were 'in hiding' like somebody fleeing from bondage, or that had faded or disappeared from the field of visibility. However, in the case of artworks centred on, for example, the Andromeda myth, there was also a history of deliberate artistic suppression or occlusion of Africana (see Chapter Four) that called into question whether 'fugitive' was a suitable term, because it might suggest that Africana motifs had rendered themselves invisible voluntarily.

Perhaps, a more appropriate term might have been 'occluded' or 'hidden', or 'suppressed'? However, I chose to keep the term fugitive not only because of its ironic racializing allusion to the visibility of pigmentation in art, but also because it recalled several of the specific

resistance narratives of African people from the era of racial slavery and colonialism that I invoked through my research. In particular, I found that resistance on the Parlange Plantation (Chapter 8) and against Brazilian slavery (Chapter 9) had been accomplished by African fugitives, and because I wanted my work to pay homage to them, I kept the term.

So, in those cases when I had concluded that a Tate artwork's unseen conditions of existence did include specific 'fugitive' Africana, then I regarded that Africana as being 'masked' by the artwork. My specific use of the term 'masking' therefore denoted the function artworks had in relation to fugitive Africana which they embodied iconologically, not overtly. However, the word 'mask' (including masked/unmasked, masking/unmasking) had a complex legacy that encompassed literal masks ranging from histories of Hellenic theatre (Jenkins IN Mack, 1994; 157), through 17th-century courtly masques like *The Masque of Blackness* (Jonson, 1605) and 18th-century masked balls, to the 'man in the iron mask' from translations of the 1847 novel *The Vicomte of Bragelonne (2001; 371)* by the Afro-French writer Dumas (1802–1870). And, in the wake of empire the English term 'mask' was linked to African and Diasporic cultural concepts such as 'mas', the abbreviated term for the Carnival masquerades of Trinidad in the Caribbean (Riggio, 2004; 93). Whilst dictionaries defined masks as wearable objects of concealment, disguise or protection for human faces (Fowler, 1990; 729), I saw them as distinct from veils, being often more rigid in construction. However, and importantly for my research, masks functioned not only to occlude facial identity, but also to represent other alternative identities through sculpted or painted faces. This meant the mask trope possessed its own wide, often metaphorical usage in discourse: so, the discovery of a spy might be an unmasking (Mack, 1994; 12), whilst Marx (1818–1883) invoked successive 'masks' ('charaktermaske') of political behaviour for Louis Napoleon (1808–1873) (1996; 67). Consequently, the western discourse of masks (and masquerade) has centred on issues of identity, reality, power, truth and beauty —meaning that masking's embodiment of visual transformation could be thought of in terms of metaphysical ontology (what really *is*); as phenomenology (how we perceive); or, as epistemology (the constitution of knowledge). And, alongside ethics and politics, there were aesthetic concerns at play: how might masks, or their wearers, be good, powerful or beautiful? Reflecting on this generic trope, cultural theorist Efrat Tseëlon argued that, in Europe:

> *From Medieval times onwards, the mask acquired evil and sinister connotations. It has come to connote disingenuity, artifice and pretence in contrast to original identity, which connotes truth and authenticity.(Napier, 1986) Thus, the philosophy of the mask represents two approaches to identity. One assumes the existence of an authentic self. This approach views the mask—real or metaphoric—as covering, on certain occasions, and even deceiving by pretending to be the real self. The other approach maintains that every manifestation is authentic, that the mask reveals the multiplicity of our identity… The paradox of the masquerade appears to be that it presents truth in the shape of deception. (Tseëlon, 2001; 4)*

Nevertheless, as well as recalling a discourse rooted in European histories, I also wanted to invoke the claims of a universalism for masking, as discussed by ethnographer John Mack (1994; 18) and Tseëlon (2001; 9). The logic of this universalist doctrine proposed that masking had a profound linkage to Africa because masks were identified with the cultural heritage of African peoples. One famous example was the golden portrait of King Tutankhamun (c. 1323 BC), known to its makers as a 'tep-en-seshta' but now often referred to as a 'funerary mask' (Reeves, 2015; 516), (Hawass, 2004; 116). And, Tutankhamun's exhumation in 1922–25 by the British archaeologist Howard Carter (1874–1939) was also concurrent with a western, avant-garde fascination with what were often classified as masks from other, colonized regions of Africa (Penrose, 1981; 137). However, given Tseëlon's identification of the duplicitous, 'evil and sinister' implications of masks in western discourse (even for ostensibly comical masks), a philosophy of Africana and masking needed to consider how appropriate it was to mechanically apply the category 'mask' to, for example, the mbuya concept of the Bapende people (Strother, 1998; 31) or to the redemptive tep-en-seshta concept of the Ancient Egyptians (Taylor, 2010; 109)? Egyptologists John Taylor (ibid) and Jan Assman (2015; 108) noted that according to its inscriptions neither disguise nor concealment were aims in creating Tutankhamun's tep-en-seshta: so, was its classification as a mask an instance, not of naive mistranslation, but of the kind of colonialist, 'epistemic violence' identified by Gaytari Spivak (1987; 280) and through which, African artefacts were classified 'according to the grid of Western thought and imagination' (Mudimbe, 1988; L405)? And similarly, could Zoe Strother's classification of the Bapende people's mbuya concept as a mask be deemed an ethnocentric synecdoche because:

> ***mbuya…****refers not only to the face-or headpiece of a masquerader (as in English) but also to the theatrical persona created through headpiece, costume,* ***and*** *dance [?] (Strother, 1998; 31)*

Two questions then emerged: first, had the tendency to define those practices as 'masks' functioned, metaphorically speaking, as a kind of discursive masquerade, which had served to disguise and diffuse white, western anxieties beneath a veneer of epistemological certainty? Alternatively, had the assimilation of concepts like mbuya and tep-en-seshta into the category 'mask', meant that its ethnocentrically sinister connotations were, in practice, negated because the category had been expanded to include redemptive, Africana cultural practices?

Whilst the narrative of disguise had produced the concealment discourses of masking, the African-American cultural theorist Clyde Taylor considered the paradoxes by which masks that were intended to function like a Greek, dramatic *prosopon* might have also revealed inner, psychological identities (perhaps 'unconsciously'). In thinking through the American practice of blackface, by which actors daubed their faces with burnt cork in order to project a fantasmatic 'black' persona, Taylor suggested that:

> *[colonizing subjects] almost certainly carry a replication of that Other self within their personalities... every White man would necessarily carry through his life a fictive Black man within his own psyche as co-habitant of his being... the colonizer internalizes the colonized as well, though he must take pains to deny it. (Taylor, 1998; 186)*

Although Taylor stressed that the blackface 'Other self within' was fictive, he also noted that another paradox of minstrelsy was not so much its efficacy as disguise but, rather, its obviousness as barely disguised fiction. He speculated that, in the case of D.W. Griffith's 1915, white-supremacist epic, '*The Clansman*', this paradox arose because the authorial motive for directing whites to masquerade as villainous, black caricatures was designed to enact a:

> *private/cultural, psychic drama in which the subtextual identifiability of Whiteness beneath the surface bestiality of Black was a libidinal requirement. (ibid; 114)*

In other words, a key (if 'unconscious') theme of Griffith's masking was, perhaps, its inherent ambiguity—as embodied by the recognisable identities and whiteness of his blackface actors. With these considerations in mind, I decided that the discursive trope of masking/unmasking did correspond to my own, practical exploration of 'the Other self within' and the 'multiplicity of identity' embodied by Tate artworks, and which therefore had the potential to destabilize complacent notions of authentic, singular identities. The masking processes in Tate's art had physical, material embodiment through artefacts: some of which included sculpted or painted faces (like the literal masks worn 'universally', by masqueraders), with an exemplar being the 1884, painted portrait *Study of Mme Gautreau* by John Singer Sargent. But, the unseen, fugitive Africana identities that I wanted to unmask could not be made visible by literally removing, or decoupling, physical artefacts at the Tate—by, for example scraping of paint from Sargent's work as I had done for my own *Elizabeth Rex Lives*. This was because, firstly, I did not think that hidden, Africana identities were embodied by a literal, alternative face sculpted, or painted, beneath the physical surface of canonical artworks (in the form of, for example, under-drawing detectable through radiographs). But secondly, and in contrast to Carter's literal, unmasking of Tutankhamun's mummified, African body (Riggs, 2014; 27), I did not intend to physically 'desecrate' the museum's collection. Therefore, my unmasking practice would be neither a desecration, nor a kind of x-ray scan, but would, instead, be unmasked in an analogical, figurative, metaphorical sense—not to literally uncover 'original' Africana bodies but, rather, to represent the complex intersection of identities such as the African plantation labour embodied by ostensibly un-African artefacts like Sargent's portrait. What I proposed, then, was a complicating methodology, through which the fugitive Africana, which was implicated in a masking, British work in Tate's collection, was made visible—that is, it was 'unmasked' through my critical practice and by my new artworks. I determined that two necessary elements of unmasking were: the visual appropriation of a recognisable element of

the masking artwork; and its visible embodiment in my critical practice. This process, as I discovered, was not necessarily straightforward however—and could be regarded as 'the site of an unceasing tussle between something hard won out of opacity and the impossibility of transparency' (Maharaj, 2001; 27).

Finally, unmasked Africana was a critical practice that could be identified as successfully embodying the unmasking process. However, this new unmasked Africana would not necessarily constitute the entirety of significations in my new artwork, nor its only, or predominant form of criticality, nor even its primary mode of existence—(it could exist as a minor or a major element in the new practice). Given those conditions, my necessary and sufficient criteria for unmasked Africana's artistic viability (or, success) were simply that it was: a) critical and; b) visible.

1.3 Outlining four phases of unmasking Africana

Next, I want to consider, in brief outline, the temporal research process by which fugitive Africana embodied by an existing artwork might become translated, metamorphosed or transformed into unmasked Africana, as embodied in a new, critical artwork.

This aspect of my methodology was constituted by four sub-processes or phases that occurred in a regular sequence. As stated earlier, they could be summarized as: critical reading, critical observation, critical appropriation and synthesis; critical reflection—in that loose (because overlapping) temporal order. Each of these methodological processes all stemmed from particular questions arising from the general hypothesis that unmasking fugitive Africana facilitated critical practice.

Consequently, through the process of critical reading, I considered the specific research question: How do I identify and locate fugitive Africana in Tate's collection of British art? Through critical observation, I considered which methods of observation would identify a recognisable and representable element of the masking artwork (including its entire form) such that it was sufficient for critical appropriation. Through critical appropriation and synthesis, I discovered which methods of mimesis, abstraction and making would translate elements of the masking artwork, such that they remained recognisable, but also functioned as a détournement-type element in my new artwork and unmasked the Africana of the museum's artwork. Through critical reflection, I considered in what ways artistic criticality had been produced in my artwork through implementing the other four phases of the methodology.

These four phases of unmasking Africana: reading, observation, appropriation/synthesis and reflection constituted the methodological foundation of my research practice for this project.

In the following chapters, 2, 3 and 4, I consider each of these methodological phases in detail, analysing their critical implications for the studio practice that was subsequently documented in Section 2 (comprising chapters 5–10).

1.4 Comparable Methodologies: African Unmasked and Kehinde Wiley

As I have observed in my Introduction, strategies of appropriation have long been an important element of contemporary art. Nevertheless, artists differ in their methods of appropriation and intentions, and this can be observed, even with formal similarities between the sources, means and outcomes of two methodologies. In what follows, I use a comparable artistic practice to provide more clarity about how unmasking Africana was intended to produce its critical effect. The practice of African-American artist Kehinde Wiley (b. 1977) is one example of another contemporary practitioner who has also worked across the intersecting fields of Africana, figurative representation, painting and canonical western artworks—all fields central to this thesis. Even so, his practice serves as an example of how appropriative strategies with similarities can differ strongly, and what is specific to each.

Fig 1.1. Wiley, K., 2003. 'Passing / Posing (Assumption)'. Oil on canvas mounted on panel. © Kehinde Wiley. Courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

Wiley's practice has been based predominantly on approaching young, African-American men in the street and inviting them to select an image by leafing through art history books

focussing on post-Renaissance, pre-Impressionist, western canonical art (Eugenie Tsai, 2015), (Hobbs, 2008; 40). Then, in his studio, the men—usually wearing their own, Hip Hop-style clothes—were employed to model poses based on their chosen image. Photographs of these models were then translated into photorealistic paintings, often embellished with motifs drawn from decorative tropes such as William Morris wallpaper. The art critic Robert Hobbs (b. 1946), writing for the artist's 2008, Studio Museum exhibition catalogue, framed Wiley's methodology specifically in terms of détournement and unmasking, both of which were terms that I have associated with my Africana Unmasked methodology:

> *Employing dialectics as a dissimulator, he détournes… or else, one can say, he unmasks the traditional power of early art-historical representations, while shoring up their artificiality and pretentiousness. At the same time, his art draws attention to the theatrics of his models' interpretations of hip-hop street wear. (ibid; 27)*

I agreed that his strategy to appropriate motifs of the body from western, canonical portraiture, sculpture and history painting, and to then reinscribe them in terms of vernacular significations could be argued as an ameliorative approach to exclusionary systems. However, I also thought the location of Wiley's practice in relation to Situationist détournement was liminal, given that he, himself, had stressed his ambivalence about Debordist radicalism:

> *"…the desire for redemption and the desire for a radical presence in the world is clearly visible in my work. At the same time, the work is also self-consciously aware of being a high-priced, luxury good for wealthy consumers, and it's responding to the aesthetic principles of a very elite social class whose aesthetic references are about exclusion and not inclusion; it's an absolute celebration of decadence and empire. So in my work is at once an embrace of Western easel painting, in all of its beautiful and terrible features, and a critique of it as well." (Wiley, 2012 IN Hobbs, 2012; 162)*

In terms of my artistic intentions, even if unmasking Africana embraced easel painting, or was appreciated by viewers with a wide range of economic means, I did not intend that my new artworks should be constituted as a 'celebration of decadence and empire'—although, at the same time, I realised that viewer interpretations of my work would be subjective.

Additionally, despite confluences of interest between our appropriative strategies, there were significant differences between Wiley's methods and those at work in unmasking Africana, with, perhaps, the most significant divergence being in how we selected canonical artworks. My methodology required that, through critical reading, I decode the specific conditions of existence which constituted an artwork's fugitive Africana, and then, through critical observation, appropriation/synthesis and reflection, work to détourne the masking process. That investigative approach differed from Wiley's artistically productive use of chance (ibid; 164) as a method of selection mediated by the choices of random passers-by. Consequently, despite his interest in western art history, Wiley had also stated that:

> *"I'm not really so concerned with the meaning of the original [source] painting.... Ultimately, what I'm doing is jacking [ejecting] history. I'm emptying out the original." (Wiley, 2006 IN Hobbs, 2008)*

This sense of cool indifference to the meanings of canonical artworks, coupled with the 'homoerotic' (ibid; 88) invitation to strangers to select his sources was said by Hobbs to represent a 'power shift with enormous ramifications' (ibid; 41). Conversely, the *Africana Unmasked* methodology relied predominantly on the artist working actively to understand, decode and interpret the fugitive modes of signification embodied by existing artworks.

Another difference with Wiley's method was that, in synthesizing motifs appropriated from existing artworks, the Africana unmasked methodology was not necessarily dependent on producing a racial metamorphosis of the source material, or even on addressing questions of race and the body in the visual register. However, these observations, did not mean unmasking Africana was any more successful, or any less so, in generating 'historically resistant subjectivity' than the street-casting and pose-selection method. Nor did I think Wiley never used a comparable, unmasking methodology of critical reading, observation, appropriation/ synthesis and reflection. Rather, I wanted to clarify precisely how *Africana Unmasked* has engaged with appropriation in a particular way that was specific in aims, form and function.

Summary of Chapter 1

In Chapter 1, I proposed an artistic criticality which drew on Pollock's interpretation of Himid's work as embodying a 'historically resistant subjectivity'. I proposed my research methodology would, as suggested by Busch, engage a range of disciplines.

Employing Hall's notion that specific, material 'conditions of existence' were required for particular cultural objects, I established my working concepts of fugitive, masked, unmasking and unmasked Africana.

Then, I proposed, as well as determinable modes of Africana for artworks, an outline sketch of my four-phase process for producing new, unmasked Africana artworks, based on critical research questions that arose from my original hypothesis, which was that unmasking fugitive Africana in Tate's British art collection would facilitate critical practice.

Finally, I used Kehinde Wiley's street-casting process as a comparator to make clear how of the unmasking Africana methodology was constituted by a specific, research-intensive approach to engaging with existing artworks in Tate's collection.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS OF CRITICAL OBSERVATION

Introduction

What follows is a more detailed analysis of the methodological thinking and practice which informed the four phases of studio practice identified in Chapter 1. However, although my actual methodology was ordered in a specific temporal sequence—with reading followed by observation, appropriation and synthesis—the detailed consideration of these processes, which now follows, will proceed in a different order, beginning, instead, with the observation, appropriation and synthesis phases, and concluding with the reading phase. This documentary reordering of the actual unmasking sequence for the purposes of investigating my methodology was intended to indicate the priority which I accorded to the process of making new artworks, so that, although the making of each new unmasking artwork was preceded by indispensable phases of critical reading, it was the production of those new artworks which was the primary focus of my practice-led research.

2.1 Making Critical Observations

As outlined in the preceding chapter, if, based on my critical readings, I considered that a given Tate collection artwork did embody fugitive Africana, I then needed to ask: what methods of critical observation would identify elements (or motifs) of the masking artwork, which could then represent that artwork and be sufficiently recognisable as critical appropriation?

What I meant by the term 'critical observation', was the critically significant ways in which I considered a masking artwork's appearance, that is to say, how it looked to me—it's perceived image as an object situated in the museum's physical space. And, in doing this, I also needed to take account of how I, as an observer, was positioned in my spatial relationship to the artwork. So, for example, one method of observation might involve viewing a particular artwork in the Tate collection from a greater distance, so that I could observe it in its entirety, whilst, conversely, another method might be to observe it at very close quarters, looking at the critical significance of its finer details and surface textures.

As well as questions of distance, I needed to consider how observations could be made from a variety of directions (from the side, from above, etc). Depending on the artwork, methods of critical observation might include making notes about its precise location; the way it had been labelled by the museum; the materials from which it was made; its weight, smell, sound or speed of movement. And, in addition, I needed to consider whether or not to employ all of the available modes of observation systematically. Or, alternatively was it best to stop observing after a specified time, or after a specific set of observations?

It was likely that the physical form of each masking artwork would, in theory, determine my methods of observation. So, for example, an artwork made from a unique or highly unusual material might best be critically observed by considering the recognisable qualities of that material. I therefore resolved that no method of observation should be assumed or discarded a priori, that is, without due consideration of my encounters with the masking artwork itself.

Although my observational acts for *African Unmasked* had a theoretical basis (the theory that by looking attentively at an artwork I might understand something about its appearance), my observations at Tate were not intended consciously to adhere to a specific theoretical text about looking. This was because, in practice, I acted on the utilitarian assumption that my artistic training, through which I had developed habits of trying to make attentive observations in general, and about museum artworks in particular, would enable me to analyse what was visually significant about a work. I describe this as a 'utilitarian' assumption, because I considered that my observations had a specific purpose, which was to produce recognisable motifs that might sufficiently represent Tate collection artworks within my new artworks.

This utilitarian, practice-based approach to my observations meant that I did not, in advance, seek recourse to the theories of phenomenological thinkers such as the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961). However, on later reflection and without necessarily accepting Merleau-Ponty's metaphysical and perhaps metaphorical suggestion of 'transubstantiations', I thought that my observational activities did correspond with his notion of an immersive subjectivity in which my observing actions were produced by my:

> *working, actual body—not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement. (Merleau-Ponty, 1993; 124).*

And also, in considering how my quest for recognisable motifs might be otherwise articulated, I recognised the persuasiveness of Merleau-Ponty's proposal that:

> *Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence. Why shouldn't these correspondences in turn give rise to some tracing rendered visible again, in which the eyes of others could find an underlying motif to sustain their inspection of the world. (ibid; p.126)*

Merleau-Ponty's conception of observational drawing as the physical tracing of an internal correspondence to an observed presence, seemed to represent accurately the processes of consideration, interpretation and attempted communication, which my drawings embodied.

2.1 Documenting the observation process: drawing, notation and photography

How would I document my critical observations in order to create an archive that helped me to remember and analyse the significance of what I saw? One important method of creating

such a documentary archive was to write down my observations about artworks. This required me to look attentively and use a digital text editor or make handwritten notes. However, because of the visual imperatives inherent within my methodology—namely, the requirement to make new artworks that included visual resemblances to Tate collection artworks—I also made photographs and drawings. These formed a visual archive containing documentary evidence of my observational work, and facilitating further observation through that evidence.

My observational photographs might, then, be regarded as functioning in the way described by Susan Sontag (1933–2004) in *On Photography*: 'A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened' (Sontag, 1979; 5). Sontag was interested in deconstructing the notion of a photograph's documentary 'innocence', persuasively declaring that:

> *in deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects. (ibid; 6)*

Consequently, in using a camera to document my observations, I did not intend the photographs to be used simply as definitive icons of Tate artworks. Rather, I thought of them as proof, not so much of the existence of the artworks but, instead, of the fact that 'the photographer had to be there', as proposed by Roland Barthes (1915–1980) in his critique of the photograph's documentary claims (Barthes, 1977; 30). In the 1961 essay *The Photographic Message*, Barthes had interrogated the codes of photography—analysing what was denotative in the image, and what were its less overt, but equally powerful, connotations.

His comment about photographers implicitly documenting their presence at a given site was intended to refer to the witnessing of traumatic events. In hindsight, I wondered if the discovery of fugitive Africana at Tate Britian had represented, for me, a kind of trauma—a rupture in my prior, complacent reception of artworks? Perhaps, by using photography to document my observations, I might have also wanted, subconsciously, to record my presence at disturbing discoveries in the way a journalist might document a crime scene[13].

Nevertheless, it was important to clarify the potential distinction between, on the one hand, observation itself, which was, necessarily, an internal, bodily and subjective cognitive process; and, on the other hand, an evidential document made during the process of those observatory acts. I understood this distinction more clearly by paying attention to the differences between my photographs of Tate collection artworks and, conversely, my drawings of them.

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13. I accept that his might seem to be an overly dramatic way of describing the act of looking at Victorian artworks in a quiet museum. But, I think that, as my codes for interpreting artworks underwent a profound shift, their effect on me represented a key subtext of my research.

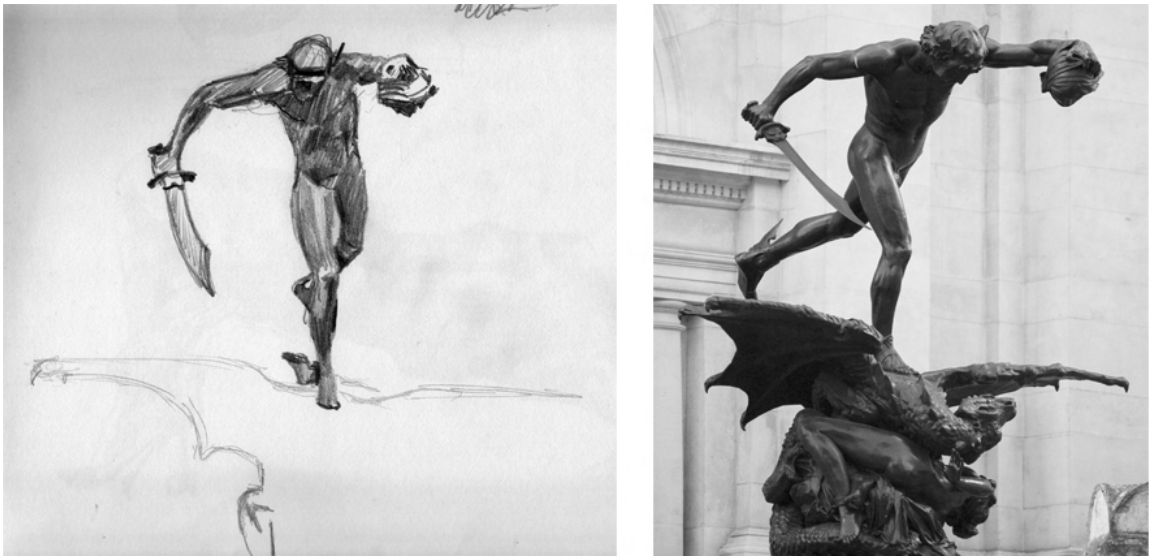

Fig. 2.1: Left: Donkor, K., (2011) 'Study of Fehr's 'The rescue of Andromeda", pencil on paper. Right: Fehr, H., (1893) 'The rescue of Andromeda'. Photograph Donkor, K., (2011).

The leftmost image, illustrated in Fig. 2.1 (above), demonstrated how, in my pencil sketch of Henry C. Fehr's 1893 sculpture *The Rescue of Andromeda*, I had documented my observation of Fehr's artwork through drawing. The image on the right records how I documented my observation through photography. Setting aside the different spatial viewpoints from which the images were made, it was clear that the drawing, operating within codes of perspective and modelling traceable to the Italian Renaissance, had abstracted one of the figures in the sculpture out from its immediate environment so that no trace of the Tate Britain building remained. Conversely, the photograph[14], operating within its technical, mechanical codes, included not only the building, but also, minute, intricate details of the additional sculptural figures of the mythological dragon, Cetus, and Andromeda, the damsel in distress.

However, when I made the drawing, the building and other elements of the sculpture were entirely visible to me: meaning that as a document of my observation the drawing was not a complete record of what I actually perceived. Obviously, such subjectively crafted acts of selection in my drawing were not achieved by the conventional photographic means of cropping or reduced depth-of-field focussing. Through drawing, I had edited out the building by constructing the image from the beginning as though it simply didn't exist, thereby making my work, in that sense, largely imaginary. Viewed innocently, this might have reflected the lacunae implied by the philosopher Jacques Derrida when he enquired of observational drawing:

14. To be more technically specific about the rightmost, photographic image in Fig 2.1, it was made at a distance of approximately 30 meters, using a digital SLR camera, with a 160mm focal length, aperture value of f5.3, shutter speed of 1/250s, ISO of 400 and with the white balance set automatically. The image seen here had been subsequently cropped and processed using Adobe Photoshop software on a personal computer.

> *How can one claim to look at both a model and the lines that one jealously dedicates with one's own hand to the thing itself? Doesn't one have to be blind to one or the other? Doesn't one always have to be content with the memory of the other? (Derrida, 1993; 36)*

Such inevitable gaps, between what I saw, what I remembered and what I drew, were described by Rebecca Fortnum in her response to Derrida's remark, as 'the impossibility of drawing from looking… [the] mental and dexterous conjuring… in the translation from sight to mark' (Fortnum IN Harland, 2013; 13). But, the blank areas evident in my drawing did not mean that I had intended to draw every detail of the scene but then just gave up. Rather, when I started to make the sketch I was already clear that I intended to imply a codified meaning by excluding unwanted information, and by producing only those lines and modelling I thought were significant or necessary—an existential 'division between the significant and the insignificant' (Barthes, 1977; 43). So, the 'impossibility of drawing' had been constituted through my observational plan to document by excision and to thereby produce a void in place of the museum.

Conversely, with regard to the photograph, when I looked through the viewfinder I was not consciously observing every minute reflection of light from the sculpture's patina, or every subtle gradient of shadow on the building's stone dressing during the microsecond which it took the camera to record the photograph: so, as a document of my observation, it included far more visual information than I was aware of in my conscious observations at that precise moment of making the image. It had an excess beyond the observable, an excess which had been described by Barthes as 'analogical plenitude' (Barthes, 1977; 18). (With the 'analogical' referring to the perceptual similarities between the photographic image and the perceived scene, rather than as the technical obverse to 'digital' photography).

Notwithstanding this, I also thought both documents indicated a contradictory position: in that the degree to which my actual observation had been recorded by either the drawing or the photograph could be reversed. What I meant by such a reversal was this: the photograph, whilst it might be claimed as evidence of my presence at the scene, did not actually indicate my subjective observation of the scene at all. That is to say, hypothetically it was possible for the camera to have made, automatically, the same photograph without my being at the site, or looking at or even noticing the sculpture (in contrast to the myth of photographs evincing the photographer's bodily presence). To achieve this, either by design or accident, needed only that the lens be pointed in particular direction when the shutter was activated (either by timer or remote control—techniques which I used for other photographs—see Chapter 9).

Meanwhile, the drawing, with its specific delineation of one, perspectival view of the sculpture —describing the foreshortening of the left arm; the angle of the head; the occlusion of the

left calf by the right knee—would have been difficult to have made without attentively observing Fehr's artwork (or else by observing a photograph of it). In this sense, the drawing could, despite its lacunae, perhaps be considered as a more informative account of my actual observations than the photograph. I understood that such questions, concerning the different effects of drawing and photography, had been commented on by, among many others, the semiotician C.S. Peirce (1839–1914), who thought the methodologies differed in their modality of producing either iconic or indexical meanings (Chandler; 2007; 36).

Consequently, it was important to be clear that, although critical observation was a key element of my unmasking methodology, the process of documenting those acts of observation was not necessarily as straightforward as simply presenting—or commenting upon—my drawings, photographs, written notations, or other forms of recollection. My actual observations—the processes of considering in detail the visual appearances of Tate's British collection artworks—seemed to fall somewhere in between the three modes: the apparently totalizing, yet almost subjectively absent, digital-mechanical product of my camera; the minimal, abstracting, yet intensely personal products of my drawings; and the inherently logical, yet simultaneously vague and ambiguous modes of the written notation.

Perhaps, though, it might have been more accurate to say that the actual experience of observation was not so much 'falling between' these forms of documentation, but rather as being, in some respects, beyond them—as was implied by Fortnum, when she wrote that:

> *Accepting our inability to verbally define the visual is important and perhaps releases us to engage with the more ephemeral kinds of statements about art that issue from a studio practice. (Fortnum, 2005)*

2.2 Archiving my critical observations: sketchbook management

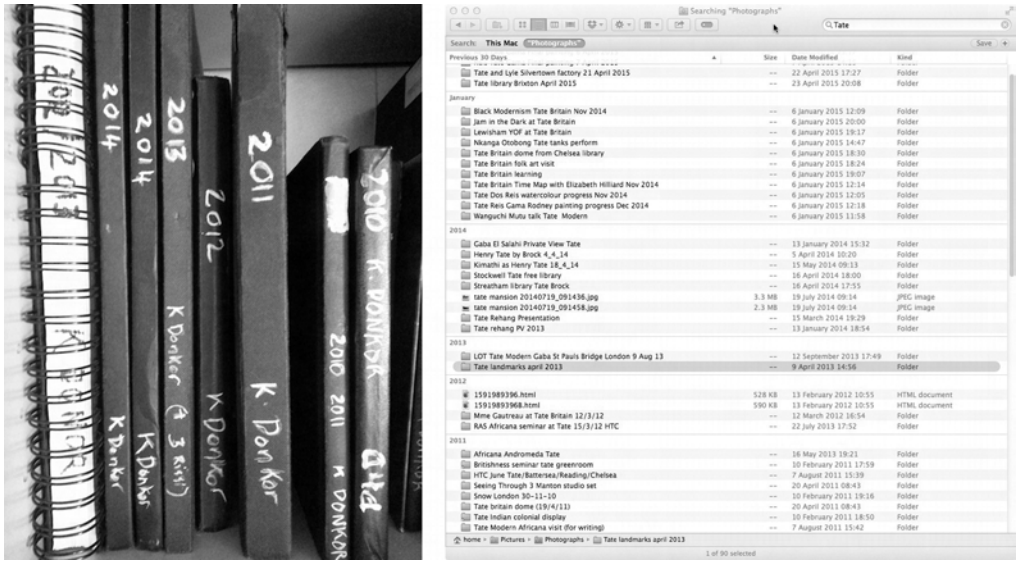

Fig 2.3. Left: Donkor, K., Sketchbooks, labelled by date. 2015, photograph. Right: Donkor, K., Image folders with the word 'Tate' in their name. 2015. Screen grab

At the beginning of this section I noted that, in documenting my critical observations, I was also creating an archive, that is to say, my methodology included the creation of a searchable repository of recoverable, observation documents, and so, now, I want to briefly consider some aspects of this archival process.

I used two principal methods to archive my critical observations of Tate's British artworks: the first involved the storage and ordering of notes and drawings in my physical, paper sketchbooks. These were filed on my studio shelves with their year of creation and use written on the spine. So, if I wanted to return to a particular moment of drawing or notation in my research, I would know where to look. An image of some of my smaller sketchbooks archived in that way can be seen in Fig 2.3 (above). Until the *Africana Unmasked* project, I had not organised my sketchbooks in that systematic manner because for previous art research projects the future consultation of sketchbook pages had not been a such a key issue after a specific artwork or exhibition was completed. Through the creation of this rudimentary labelling system, my practice altered because my sketchbooks became more than simply a storage site for prior work, but also served as a functional, archival device, the use of which had been anticipated by my creation of a more ordered, classificatory system of retrieval.

And, although I had long practiced the habit of writing the date of their creation on the pages of my notes and sketches, I was now compelled, for the reasons just given, to become much more diligent with that task, or else find that I was unable to determine when or where I had made a particular observation—which could lead to my later recollections and analyses becoming temporally or spatially confused.

2.3 Archiving my critical observations: digital image management

The second method of archiving my observations involved the creation of a digital archive for my photographs, drawings and digital notes. This was organically more systematic, because the creation of digital files is accompanied automatically by embedded systems of digital identification. Since the early 2000s I had used digital photography exclusively and so I was aware of not only the more obvious data-filing information, such as the creation date or size of each file, but also of other forms of embedded metadata. One was the photographic filing system known as Exchangeable Image File Format (EXIF). EXIF metadata detailed every function of my digital cameras in the creation of each observational image: including, for example, the strength of flash used, the focal distance, amount of zoom, colour space, white-balance, GPS location, etc, etc. Understanding this data enabled me to reconsider how my photographs functioned as observational documents, and to thereby calibrate my analytical use of them in the creation of recognisable Africana motifs for new artworks.

However, this kind of computerised information was also vulnerable to error, in part because of the inevitable user complacency induced by its apparently omnipotent functionality. So, in order to ensure accurate archiving of my photographic observations of Tate collection artworks, I also needed to check that, for example, the digital calendars and clocks in my cameras were accurate. The consequences of making such errors had the potential, in an archive of fifty thousand digital images, to make it difficult to locate important images that were filed incorrectly due to having, for example, an incorrect creation date or time.

And, in a similar manner it was also necessary to maintain a rigorous naming system for these digital images by, for example, ensuring that every time I visited Tate Britain my photographic files were placed in computerized 'folders' (also known as 'directories') that included the reference word 'Tate'—as well as by manually entering the date of creation as part of the folder name. Failure to do this, could (and has) resulted in archival loss because, on occasion, computer/user errors can cause the accidental erasure of some temporal metadata from the digital image files themselves, thereby making search and retrieval difficult.

One error I experienced during the project was that using the wrong method of copying observational photographs from one type of digital filing system to another (such as from a smartphone to a desktop computer), resulted in the computer assigning the copying date rather than the creation date to the duplicate image file. This then made it more difficult to determine when the images were actually created, thereby complicating their retrieval and use.

This kind of rigorous archival discipline extended to digital images of observational drawings made in sketchbooks because, for the purposes of the written thesis and to facilitate their use in the design of unmasking artworks, I scanned or digitally photographed my paper drawings, thereby incorporating them into my database (see, for example, the leftmost illustration in Fig. 2.1, which was made from a digital photograph of a drawing on paper).

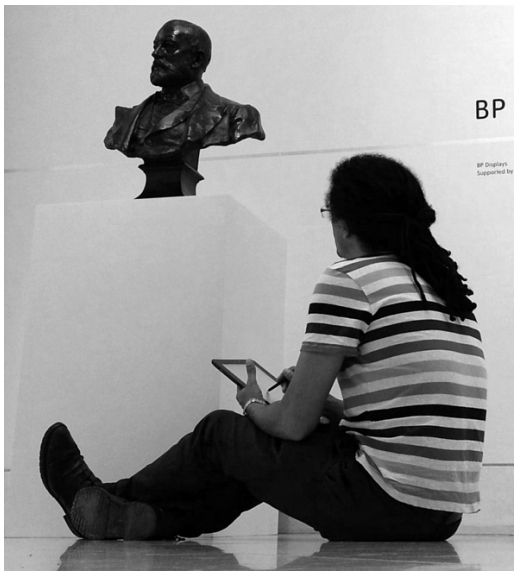

Fig 2.4. Donkor, K., Self portrait at Tate Britain, drawing 'Sir Henry Tate', by Thomas Brock using a digital tablet. 2014, photograph.

As I have documented in Chapter 9, I also created observational drawings that were entirely digital because, by 2014, I was frequently using a Samsung tablet computer to draw from life. Such drawings only had an analogue existence while on screen or if they were printed (see fig 2.4, above). These digital, observational drawings were, from their incept, incorporated into the search and retrieval systems of my digital archive without the need for photographic translation. However, as can be seen in my sketchbooks, I also worked in an opposite mode, using my sketchbooks as an analogue archival storage and retrieval system for digital images (photographs and drawings) that had been printed and pasted into the books.

Furthermore, it was important to incorporate multiple redundancies in order to secure my digital archiving system. That is, in order to guard against the potential catastrophic loss of vital information, I duplicated the digital archive of my observational notes and images. This was done, firstly, by using my studio's physical, in-house, data-backup devices, and secondly by also duplicating the digital files of the Africana Unmasked project in their entirety using online, corporate archiving systems (cloud computing). And, because I did not have a physical duplication process for my sketchbooks, the digital, photographic archiving of my observational notes and drawings on paper also served as an alternative, secure retrieval system for some of the information which they contained.[15]

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15. A few weeks before starting African Unmasked, my shared-occupancy studio accidentally caught fire, and, although nobody was injured, a number of artworks were destroyed (including some of my own). Similarly, during the course of this project, two of my artist friends had their computers, along with their back-up data-drives stolen, meaning that, without 'cloud' data, their entire, digital archives were lost. These events made me particularly conscious of the need to protect, document and duplicate my physical and digital research archives.

These methods of administering critical observations into an archive indicated that my unmasking Africana project was, in part, characterized by acquisitive and bureaucratic processes. Consequently, my research process seemed analogous to the acquisitive, bureaucratic systems of Tate—as the museum constituted, ordered and administered the National Collection of British Art and the Tate Archive. My duplication of such curatorial methods suggested that my research could reflexively be thought of as an indexical representation of one of my principal objects of study, the museum itself. And this realisation begged certain critical questions: should the administrative methods which I was adopting for the critical observation phase of the research form a procedural model for the next phase of my unmasking process—critical appropriation and synthesis? That is, should my new artworks be constituted by spectacularizing the empirical, administrative technologies of the museum as my artistic medium? And, if so, how might that facilitate the critical unmasking of such ideologies (my own as well as Tate's) about Africana, art and Britishness?

Conceptual practitioners like Fred Wilson or Meschac Gaba, for whom, museums and curatorial methods were the artistic medium of their work had long been prominent in modern and contemporary art, and the scope of that artistic domain had, itself, been critiqued in texts such as *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* by the British Museum curator James Putnam (2009). Consequently, during the preliminary stages of my research I discussed the potential of such archival and administrative strategies with the British artist and Chelsea College of Art Professor Neil Cummings, whose work, such as *Museum Futures: Distributed* (2008), also engaged with the political economy of the museum (Donkor, 2010). However, although I thought that the potential for developing my methodology in that direction was artistically necessary, I had not developed such concepts sufficiently by the time this research project was complete.

Summary of Chapter 2

In chapter 2, I have considered practical methods and theoretical implications of the 'critical observation' phase of my methodology.

I began by proposing observation as a physical, bodily process of looking at artworks in Tate's British collection. I then considered my use of drawing and photography as principal methods for documenting observations, alongside written notes.

Finally, I looked at how and why I created an archive for ordering my observations in analogue and digital forms, such as sketchbooks and computer databases. And, I also considered whether such archival processes might constitute the method, as well as the content of my new artworks.

CHAPTER 3: APPROPRIATION AND SYNTHESIS—METHODOLOGIES FOR NEW ARTWORKS

Introduction

The methodological purpose of my critical observations had been to analyse visual information about a masking artwork that would enable me to begin the next phase of the unmasking process—the appropriation of visual motifs from masking artworks through their synthesis into new artworks. So, next, I want to consider my methodologies for appropriation and synthesis, which were deployed in order that the motifs would be sufficiently recognisable to function as a critical détournement in a new, unmasked Africana artwork.

Appropriation and synthesis signalled my intent to metamorphose fugitive, unseen, Africana into a new mode of visibility, the mode of being 'unmasked'. This element of my enquiry was intended as experimental, and my methods were determined by a number of factors, such as: the original, physical form of the appropriated, masking motifs; the historical conditions of the fugitive Africana under consideration; the kind of criticality I wanted to achieve in the new artwork; and, the technical means available to me. Amongst the questions I asked were: where would the appropriated elements be situated in my new artwork? What scale, materials, and forms would be effective? What quantity would be necessary? What would be their patterns of distribution or layering? Would the new, unmasked Africana motifs be seamlessly merged into other elements of my new artwork or be sharply distinct? Would they be intact or divided? Would they exist as a single body, or be multiplied?

An example, although hypothetical, was the British, African-Caribbean artist Donald Rodney's proposal, made in the film *3 Songs on Pain, Light and Time* (Mathison, 1995), to construct a model of the Tate Gallery out of white sugar cubes (Chambers, 2012; 179). Although neither Rodney in 1995, nor Chambers reflecting on it in 2012, used the terms 'masking' or 'Africana' to describe his proposal, the artist had presumably interpreted the neoclassical building—which had been designed by architect, Sidney R.J. Smith (1858–1913) and financed by the industrialist, Henry Tate—as what I would describe as a 'masking' artwork[16].

I made this assumption because I thought that for Rodney the actual, daily exploitation of sugar workers would not have been overtly visible, that is, they would not have been denotatively signified, in the form of the museum building itself. Rodney's proposal suggested that he would firstly observe and appropriate the visible, structural form of Smith's building (the

16. In describing Tate Britain's Millbank building (Smith, 1897) as an artwork, I am using the term in its expanded, or traditional, sense, which posits functional architecture as a discipline of the fine arts—notwithstanding the fact that constructed, architectural methodologies (such as Rodney's proposal itself, or my own, 2010, collaborative work *The Los Gasquez Pyramid*) have long circulated within the field of Contemporary Art.

'masking' artwork) and then unmask its historical relationship to sugar production by making a model of it from sugar cubes. The architectural form (of Smith's building) was to be synthesized with the industrial product (sugar cubes) through the artist's interpretative methodology.

I also found it useful to think of my process in terms of three modes of signification identified by the semiotician C.S. Peirce, namely: symbol, icon and index (IN Chandler, 2007; 36). I regarded a masking artwork as not, necessarily, an iconic representation of an Africana referent, but rather as a sign that had a specific, indexical relationship to its Africana subject. Daniel Chandler (b. 1952), the British writer of *Semiotics, the Basics*, voiced a consensus of indexical signifiers as:

> *not arbitrary, but… directly connected in some way (physically or causally) to the signified (regardless of intention)—this link can be observed or inferred. (ibid; 37)*

And, it was such indications of Africana, traceable through an existing artwork's discoverable iconology, which could then, through that artwork's iconographic appropriation into another, unmasking artwork, be understood as symbolising that hitherto unseen relationship through my new, synthesising strategy. For the sake of clarity, I again took note of Chandler's (C.S. Peirce-based) definition of the iconic modalities of signification:

> *A mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified (recognizably looking, sounding, feeling, tasting or smelling like it)—being similar in possessing some of its qualities… (ibid)*

In semiotic terms then, I thought that the artistic work of unmasking would be one of translating those indexical signs of Africana which were fugitive (non-visible) into iconic signs that simultaneously represented, on the one hand, Africana (in a visible, unmasked form) and also, the masking artwork itself. It was such simultaneous, dual representations that I regarded as the 'synthesizing' element of my practice. In that sense, I considered 'unmasking' to be the production and investigation of, critically speaking, a reimagined, synthetic, iconographic representation of the masking artwork's iconological content.

It was this work—the work of investigating a reimagined, synthetic, critical iconography, that I thought I could accomplish in practice primarily by deploying representational, iconographic resemblances and methodologies. This was because, in order to examine how my new artworks produced their critical, visual engagement with an existing artwork, I considered that it would be necessary to 'quote', that is, to make a recognisable resemblance to the existing artwork. This meant that iconographic methods of visual appropriation and resemblance would inevitably be deployed in order to effect the 'appropriation/synthesis' phase of the unmasking methodology.

I thought that, in general, there were only two fundamental methodologies for making recognisable, iconographic, visual representations of masking artworks: either, by synthesising mechanical indices—such as photographs, casts or 3D scans[17]; or else, from directly iconographic representations—such as paintings, drawings, weaves, sculptures, installations and performances. Whichever of the two fundamental methodologies I was to use—mechanical indices or crafted icon (and, they were not mutually exclusive), I would also need to select from the infinite array and combinations of materials with which to physically synthesize my appropriations[18].

In practice, throughout this project, I used and combined a range of iconographic and indexical representational modes, methods and materials including: painting and drawing; photography; digital design and printing technologies; the selection and representation of artefacts and vistas; as well as employing performative strategies—such as asking people to model iconographically-informed postures. I also designed sculpture, but only in a virtual, digital form—using my sculptural designs in order to produce prints, drawings and paintings. All of these various methodologies of appropriation and synthesis have been documented in Chapters 6, 7 and, which detail my processes of making Unmasked Africana artworks.

3.1 Painting, drawing, digital design and photography as unmasking methods

My making of new artworks that unmasked Africana was intended to challenge, but not to discard or to reject, my own, existing artistic practice. That is to say, I considered that my primary, artistic task in making new, unmasking artworks was to set my already acquired practical and iconographic facilities to work in this new enquiry. And, as indicated, I documented the practical implementation of these methodologies in detail in chapters 6, 7 and 9. However, in this section, I want to consider some of the artistic, practical and theoretical principals guiding my decisions.

One guiding principal for researching the critical efficacy of new artworks could be summarised using the term 'artistic development'. Since 2000, I had been developing a studio

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17. I have here pointed to my photographs' potential iconic uses, whereas some writers, particularly Rosalind Krauss in her '*Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America*' (Krauss, 1977) seem to have equated photography exclusively with C.S Peirce's semiotic category of the index (see also, Kibbey, 2005). Other commentators though, including the art historian Francois Brunet, have pointed out that, in the first place, Peirce's 'goal was never a theory of photography' (Brunet IN Colapietro, 1996; 307); and, secondly, that Peirce had a more ambivalent position than Krauss seemed to have allowed for—stating, for example, that 'a photograph is an index having an icon incorporated into it, that is, excited in the mind by its force' (ibid; 305). For an introductory account of how writers have discussed the interaction of the three modes: icon, symbol, index, see Chandler, 2007; 45.
18. By the 'infinite array' of materials, I meant that contemporary artistic practice did not assume, for example, that a photograph would necessarily be printed on paper, or that a drawing would necessarily be made using pencil. My iconographic representations might have been encoded in virtually any material, depending on the process selected.

practice which investigated how combinations of reading, observation, drawing, photography, digital design and painting could produce a critical, imaginary methodology. In that sense, the present project was positioned as a systematic development of that existing practice, informed by inquiry into how new artworks might critically unmask Africana in Tate's British collection.

A second set of principals, used to investigate precise methods for synthesising the iconography of my new artworks, could be defined as 'artistic necessity' and 'artistic sufficiency'. By 'artistic necessity' I meant that if I surveyed a domain of practice within the field of contemporary art and found that a critical concern had not been already addressed, (or else, had not been addressed sufficiently), then I would consider that dearth to denote a necessity that the concern should be examined through my own practice.

So, for example, when I realised that the mythological Andromeda's African identity was of critical iconographic significance, but that it had not been researched sufficiently within the artistic domain of contemporary British painting, I considered it to be a dearth that produced a critical necessity that I research how new painting might address that concern.

And, by the term 'artistic sufficiency' I meant an inquiry into how my new artwork sufficiently addressed a critical concern. So, with regard to the question of Andromeda's African identity, I would also research whether, or how, my proposed (or completed) painting about that subject did constitute a sufficient method of addressing that concern. In other words, while it might have been *necessary* to create an artwork as a methodology of inquiry, I could not assume that it would automatically produce a *sufficient* result. So, the sufficiency of painting as a method of inquiry was not a given—because, irrespective of how many times a project might be started, adjusted, revised or repeated, the possibility of my failure to sufficiently fulfil the dearth in painting that my critical reading had identified was always plausible.

On reflection, I found that a one useful way to describe the general relationship between artistic necessity and sufficiency in the field of painting was proposed by Merleau-Ponty:

> *…discovery itself calls forth still further quests. The idea of a universal painting, of a totalization of painting, of a fully and definitively achieved painting is an idea bereft of sense. For painters the world will always be yet to be painted…. (Merleau-Ponty, 1993; 148)*

However, although it was reasonable to use the principals of artistic development, necessity and sufficiency to determine the selection of painting, drawing, digital design or photography

as iconographic methodologies, it would have been negligent if I had failed to address some of the controversies and contradictions which accompanied these processes. In particular, having already addressed some of the implications of photography and drawing as research methodologies, I want now to address some questions concerning the extent to which the domain of painting constituted a necessary and sufficient critical methodology.

3.2 Possibilities and problematics of painting as an iconographic methodology

In this section, I consider the practice of painting as a methodology of critical artistic enquiry in two ways. Firstly, I attempt to address painting in the context of a discourse about its suitability as a method of artistic enquiry. In doing so, I have made some reflections on relevant practice and thinking by artists, critics and historians. Then, I look at one example of my own practice prior to this thesis and consider how it relates to the discourse of painting's fate—although I have not attempted to propose a general theory of painting, nor suggest that painting was my only potential method of enquiry. Finally, I consider some specific methodological questions pertinent to the studio practice of *Africana Unmasked*.

3.3 The death of painting discourse: online trends

From the outset, it was likely that, in order to appropriate iconographic motifs from Tate artworks for synthesis into new, unmasking artworks, I would use painting as a methodology. However, since roughly the mid-19th Century, discussion about the nature, purpose, necessity, internal methodologies, relevance and critical value of panel painting has, on occasion been apocalyptic—heralding a possible extinction of the method. And, in turn, the apocalyptic discourse itself has also been subjected to a kind of meta-analysis, as writers and artists have attempted to understand and interpret the 'death of painting' discourse itself.

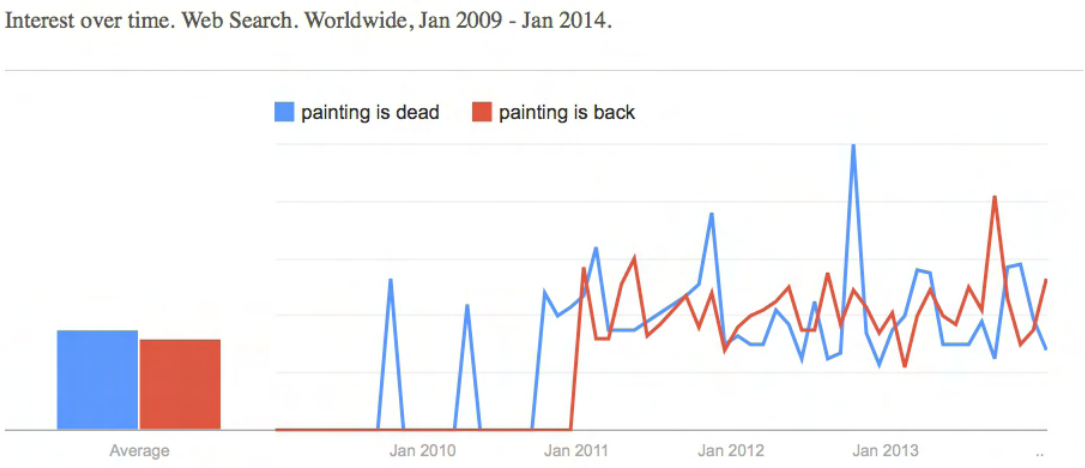

Fig 3.1. Kirsch, C., 2014. "Painting Is Dead" Versus "Painting Is Back". Screen grab.

One intrinsically contemporary response to this discursive complex was produced by the American art blogger Corinna Kirsch in 2014 (see fig. 3.1, above). Using 'Google Trends' software, she designed and published a graph which tracked and compared usage of two search terms between January 2009 and January 2014: 'painting is dead' and 'painting is back'. The purpose of this type of survey was to gauge public interest in particular topics,[19] and the two search terms' comparative variation in frequency ranged from rough parity in March 2011, (with 40 vs 43%) to wide differences. So, there was complete domination in favour of 'death' in January 2010 and a 5:4 swing back to 'life' in January 2014, although oscillation across the period seemed to centre on statistical parity. Along with her brief commentary, Kirsch added links to recent online essays and reviews exemplifying the 'death/life of painting' genre and, thinking about the critical implications of this discourse, she commented that:

> *Oddly, it's hard to find articles where people actually believe that painting is dead. Nobody's willing to go on the record saying it is finally, truly, and forever dead. Instead, we get an in-crowd of critics attempting to knock down a straw man that nobody really believes in. (Kirsch, 2014)*

In some respects, there was an intriguing paradox about this initiative, because the very form of the survey seemed to embody key themes identified in the 'death of painting' discourse. Produced and published entirely online, it represented the following phenomena: the inherent ephemerality of the modern, digital, online epoch (in contrast to painting's weighty materiality); it also represented machine reproducibility—as the survey was available instantly and identically on billions of computers (in contrast to painting's validation of 'uniqueness'); its 'new media' presentation was on a computer/tablet/'phone screen (in contrast to painting's seemingly 'archaic' materials); and it was visualised using Google's supposedly 'anonymous', corporate design standards (in contrast to painting's validation of individual handicraft).

The concepts mobilised by this paradox: machine vs handicraft, new media vs obsolescence, collectivity vs individuality and reproducibility vs uniqueness, were binaries that had all been addressed by 'death of painting' commentators like the early twentieth-century Soviet artists Kasimir Malevich (1879–1935) and Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956) (IN Bois, 1986), as well as by western critics such as Douglas Crimp (b. 1944) the writer of *The End of Painting*, (1981) and Yve-Alain Bois (b. 1952) who wrote *The Task of Mourning* in 1986.

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19. Search engines can log the search terms entered by users, and the aggregates of this data can then be the subject of statistical analysis. One example in the peer reviewed journal *Scientific Reports* (Preis, T. et al., 2012) noted that Google Trends does not supply absolute volume of searches terms, but compares the relative volume of more than one search term. So, in every graph, the highest usage of a term is rated as 100, and the lowest is at zero. Google Trends also claims to only analyze 'data for popular search terms, so terms with low volume won't appear', and also to eliminate 'repeated queries from a certain user over a short period of time'.

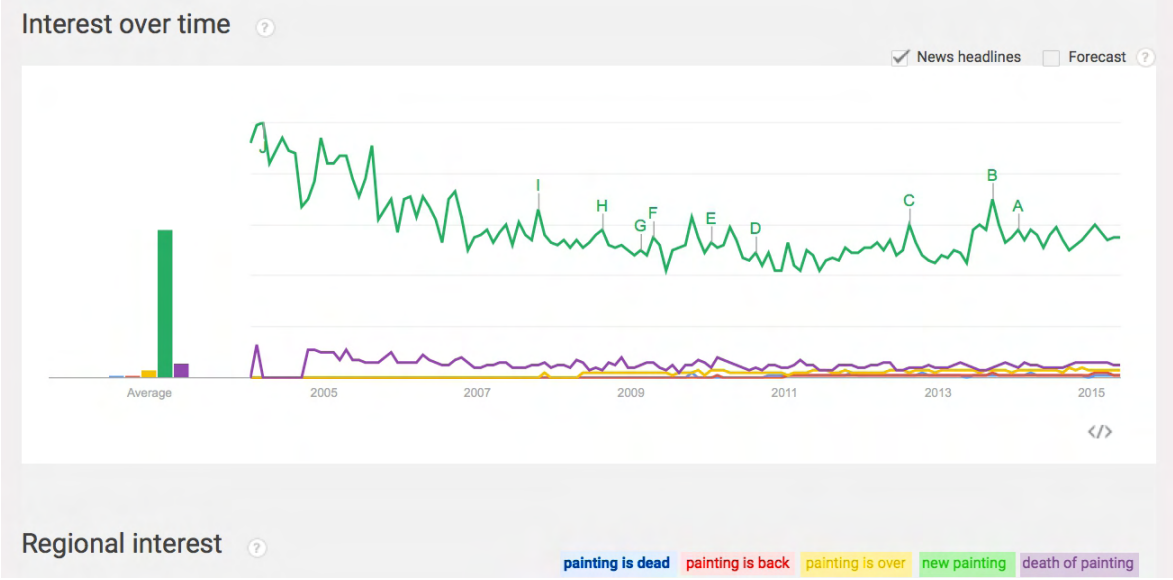

Fig 3.2. Donkor, K., Expansion of the search terms for 'painting is dead' on Google Trends. 2015, screen grab..

Nevertheless, the technical facility of online resources recruited by Kirsch for her survey could also be deployed to question a problematic inherent in how all discourse is constituted: namely the framing of its terms. So, her article included a link to the 'Google Trends' website that hosted her original search (Kirsch, 2014)—but, from there, any reader using the flexibility of social media could amend her searches to identify other parameters or trends.

Inevitably, Kirsch's search was literally Anglocentric, so its language would have needed translation in order to ascertain global, online interest. Notwithstanding that, I added the phrase 'painting is over' in an attempt to make the data more relevant to a UK vernacular—and, to correspond with another specific term of discourse, I also added 'death of painting'. Finally, I added an alternative search term from the 'alive' side of the debate: 'new painting' (see fig. 3.2, above). Whilst the opposite of a metaphorical death might be regarded as 'life' or a return to life—as expressed in the term 'painting is back'—I also thought a more appropriate opposite to painting's death would refer, not so much to resurrection, as to birth.

After all, if I was to regard painting metaphorically as a multifarious *species* of being, rather than as a singular, Hobbesian Leviathan[20] subject to an individual's solitary life/death struggle, then, surely, the real measure of that species' prospects of survival would be counted in its regenerative capacity—that is to say, in how frequently new, surviving instances of the species were brought into being. In which case, in a discourse of painting's decline or demise, one

20. 'Hobbesian Leviathan' refers to the book *Leviathan*' (1651) by the English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1642–1651), who believed that the population of a given state was best represented by a single body, the 'Leviathan' monarchy.

measure of its health might be estimated by tracking the amount of 'new painting' brought into existence. Of course, including the search term 'new painting' into the Google Trends data did not measure the existence of actual new painting, but it did seem to measure online English-language interest in the subject. And, even when I extended the graph diachronically beyond Kirsch's timeframe, I could observe that online interest in 'new painting' seemed to completely dwarf interest in painting's death, decline or resurrection (see fig. 3.2, above).

One caveat was that from 2005–2007 'new painting' declined from being totally dominant in relation to the other terms (constituting 100% of all queries), to being only generally dominant (one might even suggest, 'hegemonic'). It was possible that 'technical', internet-usage issues might have accounted for that initial decline followed by stability. Nevertheless, in this continued online interest, I thought there was a correlation to the phenomena noted by Yve-Alain Bois, who, writing in 1986, observed that:

> *the desire for painting remains, and… this desire is not entirely programmed or subsumed by the market: this desire is the sole factor of a future possibility for painting... (Bois, 1986; 44)*

3.4: The death of painting discourse—critical content

I noted earlier that several commentators who have heralded the death or 'end' of painting have been leading figures in the history of modern, postmodern and contemporary art. In 2011, the art historian James Elkins (b. 1955) suggested that a 'history needs to be written of the times painting has been said to be at an end' (Elkins, 2011) and, although it is not possible to embark on such a project here, it makes sense to sketch an outline of the field.

In fact, some writing about painting's end has included historiographies of the discourse itself. One, comparatively recent example was the 2005, unpublished doctoral thesis by the Australian artist Victoria Reichelt (b. 1979) titled *Painting's Wrongful Death: The Revivalist Practices of Glenn Brown and Gerhard Richter*. Ranging ambitiously over almost 200 years and including European and North American commentary, Reichelt identified persuasively the key discursive events, themes and individuals—which I will list in more-or-less chronographic order:

Firstly, Reichelt noted that the German idealist philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1771–1831) proposed, in his Berlin lectures of the 1820s, a hypothesis that art in general would 'end' for reasons connected with what he saw as the 'spirit' of historical development. (Reichelt did not, though, address directly Hegel's 'dialectics', nor the philosophically anterior, 'immanence' of Immanuel Kant 1724–1804). Then came the invention of photography in 1839, which out-competed the documentary, mimetic, social function of painters by its low cost and mechanically precise representation of visual appearances. Subsequently, the controversial paintings of Edouard Manet (1832–1883) were identified as 'problematizing' the

painter's relationship to their practice (as conceived by art historian Michael Fried—b. 1939). Then, Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) and Malevich were cited as leading modernist artists who, in the second decade of the 20th century, both heralded the demise of painting via, respectively, their uses of readymade artefacts and abstraction in art.

Consequently, Reichelt considered the contributions of late-20th-century critical writers such as Douglas Crimp, Yve-Alain Bois, Jeremy Gilbert-Rofle (b. 1945) and Arthur C. Danto (1924–2013) who (to summarise their contributions radically), had reflected on the significance of the first group of subjects for subsequent painting: that is, notwithstanding their individual concerns, these latter writers all tended to reflect on the significance of philosophy, modernism, photography, Manet, Duchamp and Malevich for painting.

Finally, Reichelt noted the painters Glenn Brown (b. 1966) and Gerhard Richter (b. 1932) as examples of 'post-modern' artists who had not simply ignored the portends of a methodological crisis, but had strengthened their practice by directly addressing some of the problematics identified in the modernist discourse. So, she cited them as artists who:

> *draw from other media; embrace photography [and] use appropriation for purposes other than to demonstrate painting's death. (Reichelt, 2005; 47)*

She also proposed convincingly that, in resisting the melancholy of decline, painting in general had witnessed a 'return to sincerity, romanticism and the enjoyment of painting as process; and [and the inclusion of] women [as artists]' (ibid).

One strength of Reichelt's concise, well-argued thesis was her perhaps pragmatic disinclination to debate the more esoteric theoretical premises of some 'end of painting' critiques—meaning that nowhere in her text did she try to refute or propose any philosophical or historical 'essence' of art, painting, modernism, postmodernism or post-historicism. Instead, she acknowledged that whilst such questions were of critical importance for their protagonists within their own contexts, post-photography painting had pragmatically adapted itself to new historical conditions, and, after some introspection the method had survived, evolved and been reinvigorated. However, I also thought that in taking this pragmatic approach to theory, Reichelt eschewed an opportunity to address one of the key questions at the heart of the 'end of painting' debate, namely, the question of ideology.

As I understood it, much of the impetus of modernism was connected with a concern to critique hitherto unquestioned conventions, that is to say, they were ideological concerns—

assuming the definition provided by the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1918–1990[21]) that 'ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (1984; 36). So, in 1962, the modernist artist Duchamp had elaborated on his contestation of painting's ideological authenticity by stating:

> *lets say you use a tube of paint; you didn't make it, you bought it and used it as a readymade … man can never expect to start from scratch: he must start from readymade things, like even his own father and mother. (Duchamp IN Bois, 1986)*

Duchamp's masculinist embrace of readymade artefacts as artworks had contested what Bois described as the 'imaginary' (Bois, 1986)—that is, the ideological belief that paintings were purely the original, unique creations of their author. And, in so questioning the ideological construct of the creative 'painter-as-genius' trope, Duchamp was also questioning implicitly the economic and institutional privileging of such figures by western, capitalist society.

Furthermore, Althusser's theory had also claimed persuasively that ideology in general was constituted by dominant social institutions, such as the church, museums and media, which, together, functioned as an 'ideological state apparatus' (Althusser, 1984; 19), moulding our individual subjectivity (irrespective of the state or private ownership of those institutions). The consequence of this aspect of theoretical critique for my interpretation of Reichelt's thesis was that, when she addressed the struggle of female painters (such as herself) for recognition by art institutions, she seemed to present that struggle as an inevitable consequence of the death of painting debate—because 'the idea of the 'male-heroic artist' was a distinct characteristic of the old style of painting that came to an end with Modernism' (Reichelt, 2005; 43). In other words, by eliding questions of ideology and the state, and suggesting that patriarchal ideas had simply 'come to an end' she also seemed to elide the possibility that recognition for women painters had to be laboured for politically in the face of still-functioning, institutionally-determined ideologies of male privilege.

By not seriously questioning ideological systems potentially at work in the field of painting, it seemed inevitable that Reichelt might duplicate other ideological lacunae pertinent to the 'death of painting' debate, namely, how that discourse had been hitherto framed in ways that impinged on questions of social contention in fields such as colonial, racial, bodily, sexual

21. Given that my artworks are concerned with questions about the foregrounded and controversial biographies of individual, historical subjects such as Henry Tate, it would be remiss not to mention that, in 1980, Althusser admitted to strangling to death his wife, Hélène Rytmann, during a mental health crisis. However, despite this abominable tragedy later in his life, his earlier writing on ideology and Marxism was influential in critical theory.

gendered and class privilege[22]. And, to the extent that her discourse was framed exclusively as being about the concerns of white artists in neocolonial Australia, the EU and North America, there appeared to be an inability to go beyond such complacency.

3.5 New discourses of painting and ideology

However, in thinking of painting as a critical methodology, I was also conscious of other contemporary painters whose work and discourse was intended overtly to interrogate ideological concerns—with one of the most forthright being the African-American painter Kerry James Marshall (b. 1959). Interviewed by the black British curator Deborah Smith on the occasion of his 2005 exhibition at the Camden Arts Centre in London, Marshall claimed:

> *I am on a mission of a sort, which has to do with the position of African American artists within the narrative of art history. I am constantly looking, examining how images work, how they are received and the function they perform in the evolution of contemporary art history… A 'white' power elite with the capital resources to build institutions, codify definitions and create markets sets the parameters. Their bias determines what is good and who is best. Without real practical instruments for judging the values of 'art works', non-whites will remain under the subjective authority of this elite, with no mechanism for challenging its dominance. (Marshall, 2005; 17)*

In this cogent articulation of the motivations for his practice, Marshall cited an elite 'bias', persistent, unstated institutional 'codifications' and the setting of 'market parameters'—against which he proposed his own painting as a methodology for questioning the social function of images. Thus, Marshall made clear that for him, painting—far from being dead, or ended, or resuscitated or inherently complacent—had an actively agonistic role in the formation of a counter-imaginary to that which was ideologically dominant in the U.S. and beyond. And yet, shortly before that catalogue interview for Marshall's *Along the Way* exhibition in London, the potential for painting to function as counter-hegemonic imaginary was dismissed by Rosalind Krauss (b. 1940), one of the United States leading, white, art critics.

In 2004, Krauss spoke at Tate Modern to debate her recent encyclopaedia-scale Art History text book, called *Art Since 1900: Modernism · Antimodernism · Postmodernism* (Foster, 2004/2012), which had been co-written with the (all white) team of regular *October* magazine contributors, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh (b. 1941), David Joselit and Hal Foster (b. 1959). It was a book which, in its ambition and scale, was clearly intended to become a new foundation for public and professional understanding of the era—but, in his introductory remarks, the Director of Tate, Sir Nicholas Serota (b. 1946), claimed it was 'extraordinary' that for the last

22. As an instance of such omission: Malevich and Rodchenko announced their endings to painting in 1920 and 1921 respectively (Bois, 1986) that is, to say in the historical aftermath of the 1917, proletarian revolution in Russia, to which both were strongly committed. Given that painting was identified with the tastes of the overthrown ruling classes, it was intriguing that the revolution was entirely left out of Reichelt's account.

35 years of the chronologically ordered, 800-page volume—that is, for one-third of its contents—only three paintings[23] were illustrated (Serota IN Krauss, 2004; 09:36).

Whilst the precise number of painting illustrations was debatable, it seemed that for Krauss and her colleagues 1970 had marked a turning point, after which, the relative significance of painting to art had irrevocably diminished to minuscule proportions. And later, during the debate at Tate Modern, perhaps goaded by Serota's implicit questioning of her impartiality as a 'protagonist' (ibid) in contemporary-art discourse, Krauss seemed to justify the dearth of painting in the latter third of *Art Since 1900* by declaring unequivocally that:

> *People could say that painting, as a technical support, is over. It would be possible to argue that, and some people think that: I think that, for example. (Krauss, 2004; 1:16:30)*

Moreover, as if to inadvertently foreshadow (or perhaps to unwittingly provoke) Marshall's point, *Art Since 1900* barely touched on the work of African-American or black European artists, affording only a marginal and exclusively racialized presence in the text (Foster, 2012; 334 and 683), listed in the index under the category of 'black art' (Foster, 2012; 808), or otherwise described as 'politicized black art'. Furthermore, although its back cover claimed the book represented 'a map that others may use to navigate their own course', (Foster, 2012) there was little indication that it was a map on which the continents of Africa, South America, Asia or Oceania existed—along with their artists[24].

Specifically, this particular, institutionally privileged discourse of modernism tended to overlook modernist interventions by non-western artists—such as the Sudanese painter Ibrahim El-Sahali (b. 1930) or the distinguished Indian painter Jamini Roy (1887–1972). There was, therefore, a coincidence, (if not a causal relationship), between the authors' disavowal of almost all painting that was not practiced by white men between 1900 and 1970, and its apparent marginalization of painters in any era who were not white. And this coincidence, because the tendency was unremarked, seemed to imply the operation of an unstated ideology that privileged a white, western, patriarchal and bourgeois concept of modernism.

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23. In the second, 2012, edition of *Art since 1900*, there were certainly more than just three illustrated paintings included for the period between 1970 and 2010—approximately a dozen out of 200. However, there is no doubt that 1970 represented a clear turning point in the book's visual narrative, with the documentation of installation, performance, ready mades, sculpture, photography and video vastly predominating, and images of paintings occupying a far less significant role in the remaining 200 pages than they had in the preceding 580 pages. The entire volume contained 744 illustrations.

24. That is not to say that there were no artists included from outside of Western Europe, Soviet Russia or North America. The second edition did include, for example, a small, ghettoised section for Chinese artists (Foster, 2012; 758), and there were other sporadic inclusions, which functioned only to emphasize what seemed to be a pervasive, ideological bias.

In 2015 though, the publishers of *Art Since 1900*, Thames & Hudson, produced a book that seemed almost a pointed rectification of the disciplinary and racialized exclusions and compartmentalizations evinced by the Foster/Krauss volume. Containing 230 illustrations, *Painting Now,* by the white American Suzanne Hudson (b. 1977), announced its differentiated approach to inclusiveness from the very start by placing on its front cover an illustration from a monumental painting of a black model by the Nigerian/African-American, gay, male, painter Kehinde Wiley[25]. Compared to the earlier text, this book made a more convincing effort to begin broadening the identification of historically significant art beyond the national, gendered and racially inscribed boundaries that had, in part, constituted the modernist era.

And, in considering painting as a necessary, artistic methodology, Hudson stated in her introduction (and, perhaps with an understandable measure of defensiveness) that:

> *I regard material experimentation as inherently conceptual, meaning that painting, too, is capable of manifesting its own signs, not merely as "process" but as embodied thinking. To say this is neither to reassert the preeminence of painting, nor to avow its uniqueness but to claim that painting has become more, rather than less, viable after conceptual art, as an option for giving idea form and hence for differentiating it from other possibilities. (Hudson, 2015; 25)*

Hudson's recognition of painting's implicit conceptual engagement through experimental 'embodied thinking' was a necessary rebuttal to complacent notions that the method was automatically uncritical and passé. Refreshingly, Hudson's text, whilst eschewing eulogising rhetoric about individual painters' work, also produced a studious awareness and avoidance of the pitfalls of romanticizing the practice—pitfalls which had, of course, been foregrounded by *October* magazine writers about painting such as Douglas Crimp (Hudson, 2015; 15).

In some respects, like the practice itself (as theorized by Reichelt), Hudson's book appeared to have absorbed and applied critiques about ideologically complacent discourses of painting made by earlier writers. And this heightened sense of critical awareness was, perhaps, unsurprising because the author's own PhD dissertation had been advised by an *Art Since 1900* co-author, Hal Foster. Furthermore, Hudson's chosen subject had been the painting of the American Robert Ryman (b. 1930)—whose work had also been the focus of Foster's long-term colleague, Bois who, in 1986 had deemed Ryman's pale, abstract canvases to be the last, best hope of modernist painting's survival (Bois, 1986).

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25. This was Wiley's 5.75 meter-wide *The Virgin Martyr St. Cecilia* (Wiley, 2008). *Art Since 1900*'s cover had an illustration of an abstract painting by the white, German, male, heterosexual artist Gerhard Richter, his '*Marian*', (1983). I do not ascribe any ethical or artistic value to either artist's identity, per se. Nevertheless, the *Art Since 1900* cover seemed to restate seemingly ideological normative patterns of demographic artistic exclusivity, whereas *Painting Now*'s cover demonstrated a willingness to break with them.

3.6 My prior development of figurative oil painting as a critical methodology

Fig 3.3. Donkor, K., Under Fire: the Shooting of Cherry Groce, 2005. Oil paints on canvas, 121cm x 182cm.

I now want to consider my prior artistic development of painting as a necessary and sufficient component of my methodology. To do so, I want to consider an artwork which, like Marshall, I exhibited in London, a year after Krauss's assertion that 'painting is over'.

In 2005, I produced a new body of work called *Fall/Uprising*, intended to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1985, civil conflicts in London between predominantly black, working-class protestors and the Metropolitan Police. Protest and unrest had erupted in the wake of deadly encounters experienced by two innocent, working class, black grandmothers when their homes were entered by groups of white, male, police officers. Within my diachronically ordered series of paintings, *Under Fire: the Shooting of Cherry Groce* (see Fig 3.3, above) addressed one incident that occurred in the early hours of 28th September 1985 in Brixton, London.

According to news reports[26] and court testimonies (the incident was subject to two court

26. The narrative outlined here has two principal reference sources: *The Times* court reports, written by journalist Michael McCarthy in 1987, and also, the inquest into the death of Cherry Groce, which I attended at Southwark coroner's court in 2014. However, the story was widely reported in the British press in 1985 and 1987, and has also been retold in histories of the era, including *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* published in 2010 (Dabydeen, 2010; 71).

cases, in 1987 and 2014), Mrs Dorothy 'Cherry' Groce was asleep in her bed when an armed Metropolitan Police Inspector, George Lovelock, accompanied by other officers, forced his way into her home (McCarthy, 1987). Apparently, they were searching for Mrs Groce's 21-year-old son, Michael, who they thought, incorrectly, was wanted on suspicion of a possessing an illegal firearm and threatening an officer (Press Association, 2014).

In fact, Michael did not live there, and Mrs Groce, who had three children at home, got up to investigate the tumult. As Lovelock entered her bedroom he immediately shot her—even though she was unarmed. Mrs Groce was paralysed for life instantly from the waist down, and, although Lovelock was tried for inflicting grievous bodily harm, he was acquitted in 1987. So, the principal subject of my painting was the traumatic encounter between Mrs Groce and Inspector Lovelock—and it embodied that meaning by denoting a policeman shooting a woman in her nightgown—in the setting of a cramped interior space[27].

In considering how *'Under Fire…'* contributed to the prior development of methodologies potentially applicable to *Africana Unmasked*, I recalled that one artistic necessity had been that, rather than use ephemeral, or delicate materials (such as a performance or paper), I had mobilized materials—such as large canvases and artist's-quality oil paints—which, through their intrinsic qualities and historical significance, could encode the monumental consequences of the Cherry Groce incident. For myself, especially, some of the historical significance of canvas arose from the documented use of cloth as a painting support in precolonial African art. The illustration in Fig 3.4 (see below), for example, depicts the earliest known evidence of cloth as a painting support, which was excavated from a tomb at Gebelein in Africa's Nile valley, where a series of linen fragments dated to approximately 3,500 BCE depicts a group of navigators (Lucas, 2000; 355/Hendrickx, 2004; 1092).

27. I was conscious that *Under Fire: the shooting of Cherry Groce* was by no means the first artwork to address the incident: in 1985, at the exhibition '*Thin Black Lines*' curated by Lubaina Himid at London's Institute of Contemporary Art, I had seen Marlene Smith's mixed media work, *Good Housekeeping I* (1985) (Dewdney, 2013; 112 & Owusu, 1986; 23). I also had produced and exhibited drawings on the theme in 1986 and 1987. And, in 1987, Donald Rodney and Keith Piper had collaborated on *The next turn of the screw* (1987) which also addressed the shooting of Mrs Groce (Piper, 1997; Rodney 1999). Furthermore, in 1989, Donald Rodney had shown his 1988 mixed media work, *Britannia Hospital* at the Chisenhale Gallery (Rodney, 1999).

Fig. 3.4. Anon. Egypt, Gebelein, River navigation scene, neolithic period, painted linen cloth fragment: 5th–4th Millennium B.C., On view at Museo Egizio (Egyptian Museum), Turin Italy. Courtesy of De Agostini Editorie/G. Dagli Orti/Universal Images Group.

Although most surviving African paintings from precolonial epochs use other supports—such as walls, pottery and papyrus—archaeologists have also found later examples of cloth painting in New Kingdom temples devoted to the female deity Het-Hert, where elaborately painted, rectangular linen panels, as well as painted tunics, were produced using gesso as a primer, and which date from approximately 1270 BCE (Pinch, G., 1993; 118).

Consequently, as a painter of African heritage who was addressing the historically significant life of an African Diaspora woman, I thought it was particularly apposite to paint on canvas because, as a method of visual enquiry, it had that powerful (if little known) symbolic connection to Africa's artistic heritage. And, the sense of a historically resonant motivation was intensified because Mrs Groce's travails had occurred in western Europe, where, at a much later date than its initial practice in Africa, painting on cloth had re-emerged to occupy a key artistic position from the early Renaissance (Ward, 2008; 80) through to the present.

I was aware too, that, in 2000, my decision to pursue painting with renewed impetus had been stimulated by my site visits to monumental Nile valley temples and museums, where I had been encouraged by how African painters of the Pharaohic era had invented effective and engaging visualisations of their ideas and society. Consequently, I thought the methodology of painting *Under Fire* on canvas did, in itself, produce transnational associations that interwove intriguing strands of art and social history, and, in undertaking *Africana Unmasked*, I was curious to discover if I could develop similar modes of association.

Furthermore, in 2005, in order to embody the sense of historical and artistic contemplation that informed the *Fall/Uprising* series, I had wanted *Under Fire* to be produced through a measured, reflective process. So, instead of rapidly sketching my figures, as I had when

producing a thematically similar series of works in the mid-1980s, I pursued a more deliberative methodology. As a result, by working closely with life models, I allocated my studio resources to constructing carefully prepared drawings, as well as photographic, video and digital-design studies. And so, with regard to *African Unmasked*, I intended to test whether the deliberative methods of figuration I used for *Under Fire* were artistically sufficient to represent, recognisably, my selected motifs of fugitive and unmasked Africana.

After completing my preparatory studies, and experimenting with the composition of *Under Fire* on a small scale, I had translated my drawn and digitally composed visual ideas onto the much larger canvas using the method of pouncing[28]. However, for *African Unmasked*, instead of using pouncing, I found it more time efficient to use a digital projector to facilitate my handcrafted translation of the computerised archives of my designs onto the larger canvases. In such instances, the methodological strategy of artistic development that I deployed for the *Africana Unmasked* project included my decisions to make necessary technical adjustments to specific phases of my overall painting process.

The process of copying from one system of coded representations to another meant *Under Fire* employed formal pictorial conventions, which included representing the proportionate anatomy of the figures, as well as the realistic modelling of their clothes, portraits, the gun and gunfire. Nevertheless, I continued to experiment, trying to understand how the materiality of paint itself might produce a sense of nuanced critical enquiry into the events of 1985, and also, into how I envisaged those events. Curious about the possibility of implying representations of fire as a visual conduit of meaning, I mixed and applied a set of vivid pigments that pictorially encoded my vision of the sharp intensities of chiaroscuro and chroma in the reimagined scene. As well as gradually building up layers of paint glazes, I also used the extended drying time of oil mediums to reflect upon and, if necessary, to revisit the still-malleable painted surface—in order to remove, cover or rework unsatisfactory areas of colour or texture, but without causing damage to the support or to the satisfactory areas of the image.

This meant that, whilst adhering to my careful figure drawing, I could conduct experiments—using the temporally extended plasticity of the oil paints to produce areas that implied emotionally resonant analogies to flame. As a result, the modelling of the nightdress was more

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28. Pouncing was written about, and used by, amongst other Renaissance painters, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) (Farago, 1999; 69). It was a kind of printing technique in which an image on the principal support was achieved by making pinprick holes that traced the outlines of a cartoon drawing. The cartoon was then laid across the support (such as a fresco wall). Coloured powder was then pressed through the holes in the cartoon so that a duplicate image, derived from the drawing was transferred onto the painting support beneath it.

freely painted: with passages of a swirling, gaseous, fiery appearance, designed to invoke the searing heat caused by the flaming bullet. In planning new artworks for *Africana Unmasked*, I realised that whilst the inherently fixed print methodologies associated with photography and digital design had some advantageous technical facets, on the other hand, the inherent plasticity of oil paint as a method of visual experimentation might also prove useful, particularly if working on a larger scale when reprinting can be problematic.

Another key aspect of my painting method that I had pursed in *Under Fire* was that I wanted to attend closely to representing convincing details of the figure's faces and bodies—so that, by more clearly articulating the precise facial likenesses, expressions, anatomies, dress and postures of my two models, the image would invite a psychological identification of them as representing plausible, living, individuals. And, it was to those ends that I attempted to deploy the material plasticity, textural subtly and chromatic vivacity of the paint.

In that respect, I intended to invite a sense of reflective empathy from viewers, thereby rejecting the psychological distance intended by caricatures or stereotypes. Specifically, I did not want my figures to represent, through my portraiture, the mode of grotesque, racial stereotyping identified by Kobena Mercer in his essay *Reading Racial Fetishism* (1994; 181) and from which, artists had sought to appropriate 'minstrel' imagery (ibid) and similar tropes. Kara Walker's images, for example, were intentionally 'slapstick and debasing, evoking…the minstrel show' (Dixon, 2002; 12) as described by the art historian Annette Dixon writing in one of the artist's catalogues. Similarly, the art historian Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw recalled that Walker's images of women often quoted the misogynistic, demeaning tropes of pornography (Shaw, 2004; 39), which the artist cited as being an important source of inspiration (Walker IN Shaw, 2004; 13;19). By contrast, because my figures in *Under Fire* were produced for exhibition in a gallery near to where the referent incident had occurred, and to where members of the affected family still lived, and also, because I had internalized a sense of empathy with regard to my principal subject, I thought it would have been needlessly cruel to produce art intended to 'debase' my subject, rather than to invoke empathy and identification.

This did not mean I thought it was wrong, in principle, to appropriate debasing images, or even to produce such images—on the contrary, I was not in favour of censorship, nor did I intend to police what pleasures or pains artists and viewers found it necessary to show or gain. However, opposing censorship did not mean refraining from analysis or critique: my point then, was to emphasize the various methods of appropriation which were available with regard to traumatic histories of race, gender, sexuality and representation, and to make clear why I made specific decisions about modes of figuration.

Fig 3.5. Left: Anon. Old Kingdom pharaoh, thought to represent Khufu. Circa 2650–2600 B.C.E. Granite. Photograph by Keith Schengili-Roberts at the Brooklyn Museum (2007). Right: Anon. Crowned head from Wumonije, Ife. c.1100–1300. Copper alloys. Photograph by Donkor, K. at the British Museum (2013).

Although I shared, with Walker, an intent to engage with contemporary and historical modes of representation, the difference between our methods derived not only from our different relationship to registers of empathetic identification, but, also, from our different art-historical references. Walker's 'debased' portrait silhouettes appropriated some of their iconography from pornographers and also from caricatures made by overtly racist artists during the slavery, colonial and Jim Crow eras—prompting Shaw to note a figuration by Walker that was, at times, 'grossly exaggerated' (Shaw, 2004; 58). By contrast, the historical Africana reference points for my, more sympathetic method, were the mimetic, naturalistic portraits made in approximately 1200 CE West Africa and, also, in African antiquity.

In Ancient Egypt, artists created lifelike, sympathetic portraits such as the granite sculpture illustrated to the left of Fig 3.5. Christiane Ziegler (b. 1942), director emeritus of the department of Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre in Paris, asserted that this portrait was 'with a high degree of probability, a likeness of [King Khufu] the builder of the Great Pyramid' (Ziegler IN O'Neil, 1999; 194). Its dating, from 2650 to 2600, indicated that lifelike,

sympathetic portraiture was practiced by African artists approximately 2000 years prior to its later emergence in Greece in about the 7th–6th centuries BCE (Honour, 2005; 120). The portrait to the right of Fig 3.5. was made in the city of Ife, in what is now Nigeria, and was thought by curators at the British Museum to have made between 1100 and 1300 CE (Drewal, 2010; 10). This indicated that mimetic, sympathetic portraiture re-emerged in West Africa during a period slightly preceding, or concurrent with, the Gothic and Renaissance periods in Europe when comparable mimetic methods also began to reappear. Unlike the white supremacist and pornographic imagery appropriated and developed by some artists, these portraits of Africans by Ife and Egyptian artists were intended to honour their subjects rather than demean them through 'grossly exaggerated' methods of figuration. (In fact, both of those ancient methodologies also represented people in conditions of suffering and exclusion, but, obviously, such artworks were not created from the perspective of 19th and 20th century white supremacist and pornographic artists.)

Olu Oguibe, writing about the Nigerian, modernist painter Aina Onabolu (1882–1963) suggested that:

> *mimetic and figurative realism were part of Onabolu's own artistic heritage as a Yoruba, in the form of the realist traditions of classical Ife court art. (Oguibe, 2004; 51)*

Similarly to Onabolu, I had my own strong connections of family and friendship with Nigeria, and came to my understanding of Ife portrait methodologies through the Nigerian art historian Ekpo Eyo (1931–2011), author of *Two Thousand Years of Nigerian Art* (1977), which I first read when it was gifted to me in the early 1990s. Therefore, I regarded my use of a more sympathetic, mimetic approach to painting as 'a translation of this realist heritage' (Oguibe, 2004; 51). Consequently, in considering which artistically sufficient methodologies I would devise for new *African Unmasked* artworks, I could not exclude the potential necessity to develop the sympathetic, mimetic approach that I had taken in *Under Fire*.

Reflecting on *Under Fire*, I thought it demonstrated how the plastic ability of paint to sustain codified rigours of mimetic drawing, whilst producing subtle significations through form, colour and three-dimensional texture, might prove useful in the *Africana Unmasked* project, particularly for the representational and imaginative requirement to research the synthesis of masking motifs within new artworks. Therefore, in embarking on this research, *Under Fire* served, not just as an example of how figurative painting had sufficiently fulfilled a set of artistic necessities, but also, it showed that the methodology already constituted a practice of artistic development that could be reworked within the new project.

Summary of Chapter 3.

In this chapter, I began by proposing general, methodological principles about the appropriation and synthesis phase of the Unmasking Africana process, citing the semiotics of Donald Rodney's Tate Gallery sugar proposal to use mimetic iconography and symbolic materials in order to translate unmarked, indexical traces of African identity into visibility.

In producing new artworks, I would apply three principles: artistic development would enable me to utilise my already existing facilities; and artistic necessity would enable me to identify a dearth that had not been addressed with artistic sufficiency.

Then, noting that the sufficiency and necessity of painting as an artistic methodology had been repeatedly contested, I considered such claims in the light of contemporary and historical commentary by, amongst others Kirsch, Reichelt, Krauss, Hudson and Marshall; and cited Althusser's concept of ideology as describing a key obstacle to effective criticality.

Finally, I proposed my 2005 painting, *Under Fire: the Shooting of Cherry Groce*[29] as a methodological model of how the plastic, material properties, as well as the historic, discursive context of painting and sympathetic portraiture could produce a critical practice that I might be able to effectively develop to research the unmasking of fugitive Africana.

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29. When the painting was first exhibited, *'the Shooting of Cherry Groce*' was not part of its title, although the historical incident, including the names of all protagonists, was detailed in the exhibition documentation and press release. Shortly before the private view, the Metropolitan Police dispatched two officers to the Bettie Morton Gallery, demanding that my artworks be removed from the exhibition, because of a 'complaint' about 'nudity'. Later, in a statement to London's *Time Out* magazine, a police spokesperson promised to take 'no further action' (Taylor, 2005; 16).

CHAPTER 4: CRITICAL READING AS THE INITIAL PHASE FOR UNMASKING AFRICANA

As stated in Chapter 1, the methodological phase of the unmasking process that preceded the observation, appropriation/synthesis and reflection phases was 'critical reading'—and the principal function of critical reading was to answer the specific research question: how do I identify and locate fugitive Africana in Tate's collection of British art? This chapter sets out, in more detail, the methodological implications of that key research problem. However, I could not presuppose how I might encounter fugitive Africana within a masking artwork. Consequently, I begin by examining how critical readings might arise from iconographical enquiries of Tate collection artworks in situ, from the perspective of visitors attempting to decode the iconology, or signification of an artwork. Then, I consider the implications of a more museological approach, how curatorial questions of provenance, interpretation, education and display impact on critical reading. I then turn to the disciplinary field of Art History, from the perspective of an artist/researcher interested in canonical artworks and Africana. Finally, Chapter 4 ends with an analysis of critical reflection as a methodology for evaluating the effectiveness of a given unmasking process.

4.1 Reading museum artworks—Stuart Hall, decoding and iconology

I considered that the process of critical reading encompassed the possibility that an encounter with fugitive Africana might arise from visiting, physically, collection artworks in the museum galleries, or storerooms. Artworks could then be 'read' in situ, enabling me to consider unmediated, intuitive indications about unstated or unrecognised instances of Africana. The potential advantage of such on-site readings (as opposed to viewing works in reproduction) were that: reproductions often lacked the detail necessary to perceive artworks fully; photographic representations did not show every side of three-dimensional works; and some collection works were not visually available online, or in print.

My method of critically reading an artwork was, in part, informed by how the German-American art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) used the concept 'iconology'—which he outlined in his 1939 book, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic themes in the art of the Renaissance*. For Panofsky, artworks could be understood, not simply through the denotative and connotative meanings seemingly apparent in their motifs and imagery (their 'subject', as described by what he termed 'iconography'), but, also by an historical understanding of the artistic context, tradition and aberrations from tradition in which the artworks were formed, that would all help to reveal their content, or, as he termed it, 'intrinsic meaning' (Panofsky, 1939; 7).

The most pertinent example of an iconological reading for my methodology was the art historian Elizabeth McGrath's analysis *The Black Andromeda*, (1992) in which she traced the

emergence and persistence of a European artistic code which stipulated, in writing and in iconic practice, that the mythological heroine Andromeda must always be depicted as a white woman. However, McGrath's investigatory progress was facilitated by her position as an experienced, professional, art historian.

In order to critically read an artwork in situ, a less specialized viewer might, instead, be confronted by what Stuart Hall described as, a 'dominant-hegemonic' code (1980; 171). Hall, drawing upon Barthes' notion of coding (Barthes, 1977; 19), critiqued how the connotations of visual signs were contextualized by a 'dominant code', intended to invoke a 'preferred reading' for the viewer. I hypothesized that Hall's theory about television could be transposed to artworks and curatorial practice, so that museum curators' relation to artworks, could be thought of as analogous to how professional broadcasters mediated programme content:

> *The professional code… operates within the "hegemony" of the dominant code. Indeed, it serves to reproduce the dominant definitions precisely by bracketing their hegemonic quality and operating instead with displaced professional codings which foreground… apparently neutral-technical questions… (Hall, 1980; 171)*

By applying the concept of a professional code that operates 'within' a hegemonic code to the curators of museum artworks, a series of 'apparently neutral-technical' codings might include the gallery's captions that conveyed supposedly 'neutral' 'professional' information such as the name of the artist, the materials used, and the date and location of production.

One obvious example of such hegemonic, professional coding in an art museum context might be found in The National Gallery, in which some of the 'neutral-technical' captions state that works were made 'by Leonardo da Vinci'. Without using the term 'code', the British art critic John Berger described the operation of a dominant, hegemonic code in relation to such labels as producing, for visitors, the aestheticized sense that, 'The *Virgin of the Rocks* by Leonardo da Vinci: …is authentic and therefore it is beautiful' (1973; 21). The curatorial label next to a Leonardo painting need not state literally, 'this is a work of great genius' as, according to Berger, most visitors had already been exposed to the preferred reading of the artwork 'by nearly everything he might have heard and read' (ibid).

However, in order to use a 'critical reading' methodology to decipher indications of fugitive Africana in the curatorial codings of Tate's British Art collection, I needed to consider also what Hall regarded as an 'oppositional' decoding:

> *it is possible for a viewer perfectly to understand both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but to decode the message in a globally contrary way. He/she detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference. (Hall, 1980; 173)*

As an example of this 'alternative framework of reference', Hall suggested, hypothetically, that an alternative decoding (or, 'reading') of a news broadcast about proposed pay cuts would produce a response from an 'oppositional' viewer that substituted the hegemonic term 'national interest' ('these cuts are for the national interest') with an oppositional term: 'class interest' (ibid) ('these cuts are in the class interest of employers'). However, by transposing the model of this televisual, oppositional decoding to Berger's example of the *Virgin of the Rocks* (1491/2–9 and 1506–8), I could imagine a hypothetical, 'alternative framework' that, whilst understanding the preferred reading of 'artistic beauty', discounted it in favour of a decoding that, instead, critiqued the painting as, for instance: feudalistic, Christian, propaganda that invoked a necessarily mystifying homage to motherhood. Or, else, approaching the work from the perspective of an institutional critique, an 'oppositional' reader might decode Leonardo's image as: one identifiable property of an antique object, whose haeccity had been co-opted by an imperial, state institution in 1880 (Keith, 2011; 32) in order to serve as an ideological locus for nationalistic piety and class distinction.

However, my imaginary, oppositional readings of *The Virgin of the Rocks* also implied that, like McGrath's iconological decoding of Andromeda-themed artworks, the oppositional visitor must have already possessed a degree of iconographical familiarity in order to propose that Leonardo's painting embodied the politics of feudal Catholicism. Of course, for *The Virgin of the Rocks*, a rudimentary religion-based oppositional reading was relatively straightforward to decode, because the work included familiar coded Christian motifs—such as angelic wings, a halo, a protective woman with naked infants and the sign of the cross.

Such familiarity with the artwork, and with church iconography, is what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) described as 'cultural capital'. Based on the systematic survey of French social attitudes outlined in his 1979 book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (translated in 1984), Bourdieu asserted that such disciplinary knowledge about cultural artefacts like paintings, was, itself, a kind of socially distributed product, which could be accumulated, and socially (not genetically) inherited; or else, withheld, invested, exploited and traded in ways which were not only analogous to economic capital, but which also produced similar effects: namely, social class distinctions.

In relation to Bourdieu's theory, then, my suggestion that I enter Tate Britain, and critique (or 'detotalize') a preferred reading of an artwork, implied an accumulation of cultural capital: that is to say, I must have already accumulated Hall's 'preferred reading' in order to propose an oppositional one. Given that, according to Bourdieu, interest in museum art corresponded strongly with social class, this suggested that the oppositional viewer of an artwork would be,

probably, from social classes most likely to have accumulated artistic cultural capital—which, according to Bourdieu were (perhaps inevitably) artistic producers themselves (Bourdieu, 1984; 83). This, I could not refute, because the critical methodology of unmasking Africana was, specifically, an *artistic* methodology and hence it implied an investment by the artist/visitor in the accumulation of that specific form of cultural capital.

However, it was also true that, by definition, in my proposed critical readings of fugitive Africana, the element that was to be decoded was not necessarily visible in the work. How was I, as an artist/viewer, supposed to oppositionally 'read' fugitive Africana in artworks when it couldn't be seen? In some respects I was taking a counter-intuitive approach because it was precisely to the degree that it could not be seen, or was not overt, that the indicated Africana element was fugitive. In that sense then, I was, perhaps, looking for a visual absence rather than a visible presence. This meant, that rather than looking for overt signs of Africana, it was through my reading of a *lack* of, for example, racialized, black figures, islamic motifs, Ancient Egyptian symbols or Ashanti fabric patterns, that my methodology began. However, this still required a set of artistic, cultural competences: it required my learned ability to look at an artwork and be certain that whatever connections the subject/object had with Africa, it was nowhere inscribed by the artist—either visibly, or obviously. In other words, my methodology suggested that in their approach to artworks the artist/viewer must bring a broad knowledge of the infinite, possible, artistic motifs relating to Africana—and then rule them all out from within that artwork's visible field of signs.

4.2. Reading artworks through museological critiques of Tate as an institution

In addition to reading/decoding artworks 'in situ', the unmasking methodology of critical reading could also be applied directly to texts and images in the online and print catalogues of the museum. These, I approached in a taxonomic way through the comprehensive, museum website's search engine, and through its print catalogues: looking for gaps, slippages, curatorial misreadings, art-historical errors and inconsistencies—as well as looking for patterns of labelling and captioning that tended to obscure or under-represent fugitive Africana.

In reading museum or, more precisely, curatorial, texts, I was aware that they were contextualised institutionally by statements that were framed ethically in order to produce a universalist rhetoric of charitable good works. And, this was most clearly exemplified by the principal mission statement that was documented on Tate's website:

> *[Our] mission, laid out in the 1992 Museums and Galleries Act, is to 'increase the public's knowledge, understanding and appreciation of art'. (Tate, undated)*

By describing this as 'universalist rhetoric' I do imply that the state officials (who passed the

1992 law), or the museum officials employed to implement it, were acting in bad faith. Certainly, in my countless interactions with Tate's staff I was constantly humbled and delighted by the unalloyed professionalism, good will and sincerity I experienced. Indeed, I worked at Tate myself as a project artist over a period of three years (see my reference to the *Seeing Through* project in my Introduction), and strove to fulfil the mission statement, as did my equally conscientious colleagues, some of whom became friends.

Rather, I mean to emphasize, that Tate's official, state-ordained mission was 'universalist' because it cited the general public (that is to say, everybody) as its intended beneficiary. And, inevitably, this universal, missionary claim must also have been rhetorical (that is, persuasive in its intent). This was because the mission statement aimed implicitly to convince readers of its own hegemonic myth: namely, that the museum possessed greater faculties of knowledge, understanding and appreciation about art than the public—whose lesser capacity it sought to 'increase'. Of course, the fact that this missionary claim was intended to persuade the reader, and that it was therefore rhetorical, did not mean that it was objectively 'untrue'.

However, the declared intent to 'increase public knowledge' could be interpreted, arguably, as an instance of mythological 'signification' as was described by Barthes in his 1957 text, *Myth Today* (2009; 109). Barthes proposed that the understood meaning of a given, ordinary language statement was also intended to produce a 'metalanguage' concept—a 'myth'—that was understood, but was not explicit in that statement. So, whereas the signifying 'meaning' of the mission statement was, 'Tate intends to increase public knowledge of art', its signified, mythic 'concept' might be interpreted as, 'Tate represents the benign, hegemonic authority of the British state in the domain of art'. And, there would be, undoubtedly, many who would find the mythic prospect of that exercise of power and authority over art to be reassuring.

Furthermore, in my critical reading of curatorial texts, I was mindful of the museological theory set out by Tony Bennett (b. 1947) in his 1995 book, *The Birth of the Museum*. Bennett analysed the structures, texts and contexts of 19th and 20th-century museums like Tate, critiquing the entirely benign purpose which they claimed for themselves. Invoking Foucault's theory of governmentality (Bennett, 1995: 98), he posited museums as instruments of civic discipline in which visitors were constituted as subjects by various institutional mechanisms (such as observing the rules of decorum, movement and property). Thus constituted as subjects, visitors were compelled to correspond to the political agendas (about behaviour and property) of the state that sponsored and guaranteed the museum.

Bennett aligned his Foucaultian notion of publicly orchestrated, institutional discipline to the concept of cultural hegemony developed by the Italian, Marxist writer Antonio Gramsci

(1891–1937) in his 1929–35 *Prison Notebooks* (1998; 12). Gramsci suggested (again, contrary to Tate's own benign statement of purpose) that hegemonic, bourgeois elites had tended to manipulate educational, state agencies—such as museums—in order to diffuse their partisan, ideological viewpoint throughout society at large (Bennett, 1995: 91). Bennett also recruited into his critical museology the ideas of Bourdieu, who theorized the entire field of Fine Art as an ideological mechanism aimed at producing social distinctions between different classes of bourgeois society (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, according to Bennett:

> *While the gallery is theoretically a public institution open to all, it has typically been appropriated by ruling elites as a key symbolic site for those performances of 'distinction' through which the cognoscenti differentiate themselves from 'the masses'. (Bennett, 1995; 11)*

However, although Bennett's ideas presented a persuasive context for critical readings of Tate's curatorial texts, the art historian Colin Trodd cautioned against an overly deterministic assessment of art museums. Trodd argued, in his 2003 essay *The Discipline of Pleasure*, that the variety of 'acts of seeing' inherent in the connotative visual culture of art museums make them too unstable to be regarded simply as 'a dominated space, a place producing docile bodies through the generation of disciplinary powers' (Trodd, 2003). Instead, critiquing Bennett and other post-Foucaultian writers, he suggested that it was another Foucault term, the 'heterotopia', which best described the specificities of an art museum:

> *[it is] the appearance of [the] popular audience… which reveals the heterotopic nature of the art museum; reveals, that is, its endlessly aberrant nature as a social space locked into the perpetual, yet unresolved, mingling of pleasure, hygiene, history, taste, miasma, leisure, work, display, learning, instruction, culture and pollution. (Trodd, 2003)*

My own 'critical readings' of curatorial texts, might in some respects, have exemplified both Trodd's notion of the undomesticated, popular audience and Hall's oppositional reader. However, to an extent, Tate also seemed to have tried to embrace (or, perhaps, as seen from a Gramscian perspective, to co-opt) counter-hegemonic discourse. Consequently, in 2006, Tate's Director, Nicholas Serota, stated:

> *We need to open ourselves up to new expertise through partnership and collaboration, in a process of exchange. In this way, we will be able to serve more people, in more ways. We need to make space for new ways of working that may create a more diverse workforce, programme and collections and a different institutional model, in keeping with highly mobile and diverse communities in a digital and global age. (Serota, 2006 IN Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh, 2013; 72)*

Although Serota's vision of greater diversity in the museum's workforce, programme and collections was described cautiously as events that 'may' happen, rather than definitely 'would' happen, the museologist, Sharon Macdonald (b. 1961) believed that, on a global scale, this flexible, managerial attitude reflected a:

> *…greater openness on the part of museums and museum staff to engage with those who study museums but who do not necessarily work in them. (Macdonald, 2010; 9)*

That is, to say, she considered that the museums were developing institutional responses to the type of institutional critique exemplified by Bennet. However, in a talk at the Tate Gallery immediately prior to the opening of Tate Modern, Stuart Hall had warned against premature claims of an unproblematic, liberatory transformation, claiming that:

> *museums, in spite of what we would like to think, are deeply enmeshed in systems of power and privilege. They are consequently locked into mindsets which have been institutionalised in those circuits. (1999; 22)*

My methodological requirement to critically read curatorial texts in relation to Tate's British artworks suggested that, despite Macdonald's seeming optimism, Hall's cautionary approach remained necessary. For example, in the case of *The Black Andromeda*, the museum had not formally engaged with the critical implications of McGrath's text for almost twenty years. This sense of institutional inertia was recognised by the museologists Andrew Dewdney, David Dibosa and Victoria Walsh, who, in their 2013 study of Tate's relationship to 'culturally diverse' audiences, made a general, practical demand suggesting that:

> *The most obvious way for the art museum to relinquish the constraint of the historical system of representation is to relocate the development of audiences at the centre of its practices and to work with it on a grand scale. (Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh, 2013; 8)*

Subsequently, though, as regards *The Black Andromeda*, the kind of progressive initiative to prioritise audience development advocated by Dewdney, was taken up by Tate's, black British curator of Public Programmes, Sonya Dyer (b. 1976), who invited me to participate in a 2015 symposium on 'The Black Subject'. It was only then that Andromeda's position as fugitive Africana in the collection was addressed through an institutional discourse (Donkor, 2015).

4.3 Reading canonical artworks through the discipline of art history

The third strand of critical reading in my unmasking methodology concerned my practice of wider reading about the Tate Gallery, British art and Africana in general. By 'in general' I did not mean, 'completely at random', but, rather, in ways that followed hunches, navigated unpromising avenues and sometimes deliberately went against the grain of everyday perceptions by challenging meanings, or interrogating the obvious.

As I have made clear already, a fruitful example of this approach was McGrath's 1993, iconographical research into the Black Andromeda, which had uncovered the iconological history of suppressing a particular Africana element in western art. However, taking McGrath's work as a model for my wider critical-reading methodology meant that I needed to

build my own critical engagement with the codes and methods of Art History as a discipline. Consequently, what follows now is my account of the theoretical preparation, which I undertook in order to equip myself for that methodological challenge.

In seeking a starting point from where I could elaborate a critical engagement with the disciplinary formation of Art History, I turned to a definition of the field by a proponent. Donald Preziosi (b. 1941), had made interventions about the nature of art history in his 1989 book *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science*, which critiqued the ethnocentric, instrumentalist ideology of the discipline (Preziosi, 1989; 41). Art history, he wrote:

> *was one of the important sites for the manufacture, validation, and maintenance of ideologies of idealist nationalism and ethnicity, serving to sharpen and to define the underlying cultural unity of a people as distinct from others.… contributing to the justification of a people's self identity through the erection of genealogies stretching back through the mists of time. (ibid)*

Thus, for Preziosi, art history could not be regarded as just a 'neutral technical' gathering and interpretation of facts, but was, instead, an inherently political endeavour that functioned to justify the nation state and its relationship to supposed 'ethnic' identities.

Then, in 1998, Preziosi edited an anthology, *The Art of Art History; a Critical Anthology,* in which he produced a succinct definition of art history as 'disciplinary beliefs about the humanly made and appropriated visual environment and its modes of analysis' (Preziosi, 2009; 4). What was attractive about the definition was that in terms of its temporal, spatial and social boundaries, it was remarkably open. Preziosi did not limit the identification of art or its histories to any specific geographical territory, periodization, or ethnic, gendered, ideological or class formations. Nor, did he attempt to privilege particular technologies of communication. Thus, if I used Preziosi's definition, 'art' might include ceramics made 2,500 years ago in the ancient, African state of Meroë, whilst a history of it (that is, 'disciplinary beliefs' about it) might be videoed and webcast. He did however, limit his field of reference to the 'visual', leaving the status of sound art (and implicity, blind people) undetermined.

Despite this provisory openness, Preziosi did suggest formal, disciplinary boundaries: 'art' must be humanly made or appropriated; and a text purporting to be Art History did require 'modes of analysis' for it to be counted as such—thus, some thinking about the objects under consideration must be evidenced in the discourse produced. So, Preziosi's concept of 'disciplinary beliefs' assumed a deliberate sense on the part of practitioners (a belief) that they did intend to work within the boundaries of the discipline. However, his precise use of the term 'beliefs' was not an accidental substitute for the term 'knowledge'. In *Rethinking of Art History*, he had already asserted the Foucaultian notion that art history had been constituted

through metaphysical ideology—unable to acknowledge its 'ontotheological' basis (1989; 43). Thus, in Preziosi's scheme, it was necessary and sufficient for the art historian to believe and argue (through their 'mode of analysis') that what they were studying was 'art' and that what they were doing was 'history' about it.

Preziosi asserted that the 'principle aim of all art historical study has been to make artworks more fully legible in and to the present' (Preziosi, 2009; 7). This aim, that the art historian be a translator (or 'hermeneutician') was also made explicit by E.H. Gombrich (1909–2001) in his canonical 1950 volume T*he Story of Art.* Gombrich, the Director of the Warburg Institute, authored the world's most widely read art history book and believed that 'It is the job of the historian to make intelligible what actually happens', as distinct from the critic, whose job was to criticize what happens (1995; 610). However, despite this agreement between the two writers, Preziosi also alerted me to the presence of dissensus, in that:

> *...there has been only loose and transitory consensus about the efficacy of various paradigms or analytic methods for rendering artworks legible, the key issue being the quantity and quality of historical or background information sufficient to a convincing interpretation of a given object. (Preziosi, 2009; 7)*

And, this presence of 'issues' at work in the interpretation of artworks was, to some extent, clarified for me in the monumental, 1982 book *A World History of Art* (2005) by the distinguished British art historians Hugh Honour (b. 1927) and John Fleming. They had reiterated a chronology of disciplinary dissensus through the ages, (which I will briefly summarise): Pliny the Elder's imperial, Roman notion of naturalistic, mimetic *progress* in art (c. AD 70) had existed as an alternative to the belief in *unwavering* principles as epitomised by Xie He in 5th-century classical China; then, after little change during Europe's Middle Ages, Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) recuperated a progressive chauvinism, which lionized the Italian Renaissance, and particularly, his friend and fellow Florentine, Michelangelo (Honour, 2005; 21).

Vasari's biographical method was only superseded by the neoclassical, gay, German scholar Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768) who proposed a fastidious nostalgia for ideal, Greek purity; Later, 19th century Romanticism maintained an 'illusion of progress' (ibid) towards an ideal art—before Alois Riegl (1858–1905) advanced the theory of a stylistic will-to-form (the 'Kunstwollen') which, being culturally relativist, rendered any notion of progress irrelevant. This was, in turn, superseded by the formalism of Heinrich Wöfflin (1864–1945), which, being primarily concerned with abstract forms, seemed to render culture itself irrelevant; Such unrelenting formalism was opposed by Aby Warburg (1866–1929) who pioneered an interpretive anthropology, which privileged the transmission of visual codes of meaning ('iconography') between eras and locations. However, that Iconography was itself relegated by

Panofsky's 'iconology', which privileged research into coded 'intrinsic meanings', and thereby transcended conventional readings (ibid; 21). At that point, Honour and Flemming's account of art history stopped naming their forebears, except to grant Marx a role in critical theory, and, whilst the contribution of latter-day Feminists was noted, none were named at that point.

In terms of art history's potential as a method to identify fugitive Africana in Tate's British collection, I considered that one strength of this narrative was that it too had acknowledged the critical role of dissensus. However, given that their book set out to produce a global history of art, my problem with their analysis (however brief) of the historiography was that it privileged the ethnocentric concerns of white, bourgeois males (which, was also the demographic of Honour and Fleming)—and expressed that privilege by only honouring in name two 'other' significant art historians—very ancient, Chinese, men.

For a book of almost 1,000 pages long, brevity could not have been a sufficient reason to forego a more egalitarian approach. This was especially so given that in a later chapter, their text acknowledge significant, art historical contributions by the female writers Lucy Lippard (b. 1937) (ibid; 853) and Rosalind Krauss (ibid; 897), whom they had declined to name in their chronology. And, given my own research focus, it was disappointing that Honour and Flemming were oblivious to the existence of the first African-American art historian, Freeman Murray (1859–1950), who, ironically had published his critique of white ethnocentrism in art in 1916.

Although Honour and Fleming believed that, 'there is continuity and change… but [no] progressive improvement' (ibid; 20) in art itself, they did concede that the 'search for intrinsic meaning' initiated by Panofsky had led to a 'much wider, more pluralistic and open-minded approach' amongst art historians, which I took to indicate that in fact they did perceive that there had been an ethical progress in the discipline of art history itself. For instance, they described feminist, iconological approaches to the discipline of Art History as 'fruitful' (ibid; 21). This meant that, in their historicized conception, the possibility of 'improvement' had slipped from art itself (as proposed by Pliny/Vasari), to art history itself (as practised by themselves). Combining Panofsky-like tools with post-Marxian and Feminist social analysis (not to mention a postcolonial critique), it seemed that, for Honour and Fleming, the 'intrinsic meanings' of artworks were now discoverable—whereas in prior eras they were not.

However, from my perspective, one immediate possibility raised by this reification of an ethical Art History was that it implied art historians could make legible the 'intrinsic' prejudices and closed-mindedness of artists, as embodied in works of art. Even so, I was left wondering whether, if 'open mindedness' represented ethical progress in art history, why was ethical progress not considered to represent an improvement in art itself? Whilst Honour and

Fleming did not believe in improved technique, did their schema place artistic practice as being beyond ethical consideration?

Certainly, Honour did not seem to have believed that art and artists were beyond ethical consideration in general, because, as the author of two encyclopaedic volumes about the depiction of African people by white artists for the Harvard University Press series—*The Image of the Black in Western Art IV* (Honour, 1989)—he had critiqued the Orientalist genre of French art for being "Sexist as well as racist" (ibid; 23) and regarded the anti-slavery movement's kneeling slave medallion as perpetuating a false idea of "black inferiority" (ibid; 64). Both judgments showed that Honour regarded such artworks as failing his ethical standards (assuming that he did not view racism and sexism as ethically neutral).

Yet, as was noted in initial reviews (Smith, 1990), he decided (or agreed) not to include images made by black western artists in the extensive survey—although his subject and period considered the U.S.A from 1776 to 1914, when distinguished African-American artists such as Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937) and Edmonia Lewis (1843–1900) produced well-known works (Lewis, 1990; 41–44). Certainly, this unstated policy of exclusion was not due to ignorance, as Honour had included the 1900 portrait of Tanner by the white American artist Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) (Honour; 1989; 17). And, consequently, the book seemed in danger of reproducing (no doubt inadvertently) the implicitly racist message of the anti-slavery medallion that had, according to Honour, enshrined the concept of black subjects as 'docile' objects of the white, racializing gaze (ibid; 64). Furthermore, the exclusion of images of Africana people by black western artists suggested that the term 'western' in the book's title should have been, perhaps, 'The image of the Black in white Western Art', or just simply 'The image of the Black in white art'—even though, that might have disrupted the late-20th-century, ideological notion of whiteness as unmarked, non-racial signifier of normality (Dyer, 1997).

If my survey of art historical theories and practices—and of their potential use in my 'critical reading' methodology—had accepted Honour and Fleming's 'World' historiography, I would not have been aware that there had ever been any black female art historians (neither Honour and Fleming, nor Gombrich, even mentioned the 'Harlem Renaissance' in their surveys of 'global' art history—which demonstrated that, by contrast, Foster's *Art Since 1900* did have some progressive merit). However, since the 1990s I had begun to learn that my ignorance of black female art historians during my 1980s attendance at art school was erroneous. Therefore, Bridget R. Cooks (b. 1972), the writer of *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (2011), was just one of a growing lineage of such authors that also included, for instance: Samella Lewis (b. 1924), the author of *Art: African-American (*1978); as well as the

author of *Free Within Ourselves: African-American Artists in the Collection of the National Museum of American Art* (1992) Regina A. Perry—who began writing in the early 1970s.

In fact, Cooks agreed with Honour that ethical progress in the field of art history was possible and desirable. She critiqued the 'entire discipline of art history' for ignoring what she viewed as 'the rich history of Black artists' in the US (Cooks, 2011; 14). Allied to this assessment was her proposal that: 'dismantling White privilege in the American art museum' (ibid; 8) was a social necessity in order to ensure the 'survival and proliferation of the diversity of a nation's cultural life' (ibid). Cooks even recruited Hugh Honour to her cause, citing his 1989 critique of Winckelmann's foundational biological racism (ibid; 8) to assert that in the United States a 'veiled rhetoric of objectivity and debates about quality' (ibid) were, in reality, the exercise of a curatorial and art historical disciplinary 'tradition of racial exclusivity' (ibid) stemming from a racialized 'hierarchy of humanity and aesthetics' (ibid).

In other words, Cooks asserted that American art history, no less than the European art history identified by Preziosi (1989), was constituted through its racism. One, minor quibble with Cooks critique was that by citing 'the entire discipline', she might have seemed to overlook writers such as Perry (1992) and Lewis (1990)—who were clearly within 'the entire discipline'—but who had not ignored black artists. Arguably, Cooks might have been more accurate to note that it was a bias specifically amongst white art historians that had tended to overlook or undervalue black artists' work. Conversely, African-American art historians had tended to focus on black artists' work in a discourse that functioned to counter what Cooks perceived persuasively as the discriminatory practice of hegemonically dominant, white art historians.

Given my own social position as a British artist of African, Asian and European family heritage, and the obvious role of ethnocentrism as the founding ideology of Art History, it became essential that in considering the potential use of wider, art historical 'critical readings' in relation to Tate's collection, I also investigated how one of Britian's leading professional black art historians, Eddie Chambers, had evaluated the field. Chambers began his career as an artist—founding the BLK Art Group in 1982 alongside Donald Rodney, Keith Piper and Marlene Smith (b. 1964). His work included eye-catching polemics like the diachronic collage *Destruction of the National Front* (1979–80), which, in 2015, went on display at Tate Britain. During the 1990s, he curated exhibitions by other significant artists including Frank Bowling, Keith Piper and Vong Phaophanit (b. 1961).

Then, in the early 21st century, Chambers turned to writing and academia, publishing, in 2014, *Black Artists in British art: a History Since the 1950s*. Although Chambers graciously acknowledged

the many catalogue and essay writers who had preceded him, his book was in fact the first ever history of his subject presented by a single author 'as a recognisable whole' (Chambers, 2014; 9). Chambers asserted, correctly, that up until the publication of the catalogue for the 1989 Hayward Galley exhibition *The Other Story* (Araeen, 1989) there had never been an emphatic, art historical challenge to:

> *the exclusion of Black artists from all manner of narratives of British art history of the twentieth century. (Chambers, 2014; 7)*

Furthermore, in his 2012 book *Things Done Change: The Cultural Politics of Recent Black Artists in Britain* Chambers critiqued the Tate's practise in relation to black British artists as producing 'theatrical, overdone and mannered' gestures made in deference to a state-ordained diversity policy (2012; 192). Such gestures, he claimed, looked benevolent but had 'masked, or left intact, much of what had historically kept Black artists out of the Tate' (ibid). For Chambers, the problem lay in the notion that, for Tate, black or African 'otherness' had been little more than 'a bright and colourful component and signifier of multicultural inclusiveness' (ibid; 193). On the other hand, Chambers recognised how black British artists responded through their work to the categorical failures of a racist, white art history:

> *[College educated Black artists] were well placed to appreciate the extent to which dominant notions of the Western art historical canon excluded, as a matter of course, artists such as themselves. [They] were keenly aware of the ways in which art history had failed them, and were determined that this wilful failure would not go unremarked or unchallenged. Consequently, their work frequently resonated with references to the manifestation, consequences and implications of this exclusion. But this was not simply a strategy of critique and critical engagement. Artists such as Himid took art history to task, partly as a way of inserting themselves into its narrative. (Chambers, 2014; 129)*

In terms of my research methodology, Chambers and Cooks both exposed the disciplinary shortcomings of an Art History that appeared to re-enact repeatedly the ethnic pathologies which Preziosi, for example, claimed had constituted it from the outset. However, what Chambers also identified, and which I found to be a useful theoretical parallel to my own methodology, was that artists with a heightened sensitivity to art history's exclusionary biases could also, through their critical readings of art historical texts produce incisive new work. Certainly, it was my intention that my new, unmasking Africana works would contribute to that body of practice.

In 2013, I experimented with affording visitors to my exhibitions the opportunity to engage in their own critical readings, through my installation, *Learning Zone*, for the show *Daddy, I want to be black artist* at Peckham Platform in London (see fig 2.1, below). The theme of the exhibition was centred on my work to engage 'Leaders of Tomorrow', (a formally constituted group of

teenaged, black, Londoners), in a discourse about art by black artists in Tate's British collection. Playing with the kind of relational aesthetics exemplified by the Benin artist Meschac Gaba's installation at Tate Modern, *Museum of Contemporary African Art* (1997–2002), which I visited with the group, my own *Learning Zone* was intended to evoke a complex visitor response. During my research for the exhibition, I had learnt that, of 3,500 artists with work in Tate's collection, about 15 could be identified as black British (that is, of black, African-Diaspora heritage as well as British nationality).

Fig 4.1. Left: Donkor, K., 'Learning Zone', 'Tablet', 'Notebook I' and 'Notebook II'. 2013. Right: Donkor, K., 'Learning zone' and 'Oshun visits Gaba at Tate's 'Big House' by Donkor, K., (2013). Installation photography Donkor, K., at Peckham Platform, 2013.

Learning Zone displayed my private collection of books about those artists on a specially constructed bookshelf, and visitors were encouraged by gallery staff to read at the table provided, as well as to research the field further, using an online computer. Above the desk were my watercolours of imaginary black Londoners using laptop and tablet computers, (titled, *Tablet*, *Notebook I* and *Notebook II*—all 2013). One of my paintings reimagined our group encounter with Gaba's work, and was titled *Oshun visits Gaba at Tate's 'Big House*" (2013). I hoped that visitors to *Learning Zone* would use their reading to consider the implications of Tate's acquisition of works by 15, black, British artists: were there common themes to their practice? Was 15 out 3,500 cause for celebration, frustration or indifference?

4.4 Critical Reflection: the concluding phase of an unmasking process

Whilst critical reading marked the opening phase of the Africana Unmasked methodology, followed by observation and abstraction/synthesis, it was critical reflection that I had determined to be the concluding phase, and through which I considered whether or how artistic criticality had been produced in my new artworks.

In fact, reflection, experimentation and judgement were key elements of my research practice

at all stages of the unmasking process. Retracing steps, documenting practice, reversing course or pressing on in spite of difficulties were always important. Nevertheless, once I believed that fugitive Africana in Tate's British collection had been unmasked, then it was necessary to reflect on the effectiveness and criticality of the unmasked Africana practice. In this enquiry, critical reflection has taken two forms. Firstly, through my documentation of this thesis, particularly in chapters 4, 7, 9 and the Conclusion. The second element of critical reflection took place during my preparation, presentation and evaluation of the *Africana Unmasked* Seminars held at CCW Graduate school in 2012. This element of the research has been addressed in Appendix 2.

Based on the premises set out in the four methodology chapters, I determined that my critical reflection would evaluate the artistic sufficiency of specific, visual criteria. I had stated, in Chapter 1, that my new, unmasked Africana artworks would represent motifs from a masking artwork in Tate's collection. These recognisable motifs would function as a détournement-type element in the new artwork that indicated the fugitive Africana embodied by the museum's artwork. Therefore, my critical reflections would seek to identify three visual elements in my new artworks: Firstly, were there recognisable motifs that had been appropriated (copied, mimetically represented) from Tate's collection of British artworks? Secondly, were there motifs within the new artwork that visibly represented Africana?

However, the third, necessary, visual element would be constituted through an interaction between these two sets of motifs in such a way the interaction would visually associate the Tate motif with the Africana motif. This would need to take place in a dual way, on the one hand the interaction between motifs needed to represent the masking function of the Tate collection artwork, and on the other hand it needed to represent the process of unmasking in the new artwork. That is to say, in critical terms, this interaction would need to 'articulate an inscription of a historically resistant subjectivity' (Pollock, 1999; 173). By that, I mean that I needed ask whether the representation of the unmasking process in my new artwork functioned to resist, (oppose, decode or undo) the masking function in the Tate artwork?

The answer to these three questions about Tate collection motifs, Africana motifs and a critically resistant interaction between them would then determine the extent to which artistic criticality had been produced in my new artwork. Consequently, my critical reflection could operate within the unmasking process in two ways. Firstly, if I determined that criticality had been produced, then I could conclude that I had achieved a sufficient outcome with regard to that specific element of fugitive Africana. The unmasking of the fugitive Africana would no longer constitute a dearth in my practice, and it would not be necessary to restart the process.

If, on the other hand criticality had not been produced, then the dearth of artwork that critically unmasked that particular element of fugitive Africana would still exist and consequently there would remain an artistic necessity to restart the unmasking process. This could require restarting the process with the stage of critical reading, as it here might have been something about my oppositional decoding of the iconology of Tate's masking artwork that I had failed to properly comprehend. Alternatively, if I felt satisfied that my critical reading could not produce new data, it might be sufficient to restart the unmasking process—perhaps at the observation phase, in order to research again what visually recognisable motifs were available for appropriation. This might necessitate using a different methodology of critical observation. For example, rather on relying on photographs or drawings, it might be necessary to measure particular dimensions, or to consider how the public interacted with the Tate artwork, if it was on display.

However, if I felt satisfied that my critical observations had already produced sufficient information, then I would, instead, need to restart the unmasking process at the appropriation/synthesis phase. This might involve rearranging already synthesized or appropriated motifs in a new configuration that consequently produced a new nuance of meaning. Or, it might involve using different media, or an alternative set of motifs. The painter Rebecca Fortnum has described this process of artistic renewal as one of:

> *continuing or discontinuing a line of enquiry, [that] almost always situates itself in relation to what has gone before. Ideas and forms present in one work may be further explored, resolved, refuted or abandoned in others. Often artists will 'discover' something in the work that they wish to explore further. (Fortnum, 2005)*

A key function of the critical reflection phase within my methodology, then, would be to identify, avoid and overturn my own artistic complacency which, according to Olu Oguibe:

> *implies compliance with the rules of the game, and not with the intent to subvert, expose, critique, or instruct, but with the sole intent to earn notice. (Oguibe, 2004; 43)*

By 'rules of the game', I understood Oguibe to have meant the economic and social pressure to conform to hegemonic practices regulated through an ideology of artistic production.

Summary of Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, I proposed 'critical reading' as the first stage of my Unmasking Africana studio methodology, and I have also considered a theoretical outline for three constituent elements in my critical reading of works in Tate's collection of British Art.

The three constituent elements of critical reading included: i) a critical, iconographical/semiotic reading of artworks in the collection, being aware of the creative

potential inherent in Stuart Hall's conception of dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings; ii) a critical, museological reading of museum texts, such as labels, websites, talks and catalogues, which was alert to the tendency of disciplinary institutions to reproduce hegemonic ideologies, as described by Tony Bennett and; iii) a general, critical, art historical reading (with all that implied about the broad scope of an iconological approach) and which was alert to the intrinsically ethnocentric biases reproduced by most western art histories (as described by Preziosi and Cooks). A synthesis of these three strands of critical reading would allow me to determine whether 'fugitive Africana' was embodied by, but, of necessity, was not visible in British artworks at Tate.

SECTION 2: STUDIO PRACTICE

Following on from my Preface and Introduction, the chapters in Section 1 were a detailed exposition of my research methodologies. By outlining the theoretical and practical contexts of these methodologies, I explained, in general terms, how I intended my research project to facilitate critical practice.

In Section 2: Studio Practice, I have documented three assignments that each embodied the practical implementation of my methodology. Each assignment has two chapters, one of which addresses critical reading, with the other one addressing critical observation, appropriation/synthesis and reflection. For each of the three assignments, I produced new artworks in a dialogic relationship with specific artworks in Tate's collection of British art.

For the first assignment, my documentation is ordered so that the critical reading phase comes first. However, for the second and third assignments, this order is reversed, so that the reading appears last in my documentation, even though, in practice, it presaged the observation, synthesis and reflection phases.

Then, after the three assignments have been completed, there is a final chapter containing my conclusions for the overall research project.

CHAPTER 5: READING AFRICANA IN HENRY FEHR'S 'THE RESCUE OF ANDROMEDA'

Fig. 5.1: 'Donkor, K., 2011. 'The Rescue of Andromeda'. Oil on canvas. 120cm x 90cm

Introduction

This chapter documents the process of critical reading I embarked upon prior to making a body of artworks intended to unmask fugitive Africana embodied by the work of the sculptor Henry Charles Fehr (1867–1940). I shall begin with a short description of one of my finished artworks. The oil painting illustrated in Fig 5.1 (above) is titled *The Rescue of Andromeda* (Donkor, 2011) and I completed it in the summer of 2011. It is a kind of 'nocturne', that is to say, it presents an image which is literally dark, and which I intend the viewer to understand as a night-time landscape, inhabited by a dimly illuminated group of figures and objects. It was created using single-point perspective, and the central, foremost figure was a lifelike portrait of a living sitter, painted from photographs that I created in my studio, and which were intended for use solely and specifically as source materials for the painting.

Behind the central figure and partially obscured by it there is a reimagining of Fehr's sculpture

The Rescue of Andromeda (1893). The image of the sculpture, as well as the central figure, are set in a landscape that includes a bright circular motif on the ground, a dark, cloudless skyscape, and also a dark shape supposed to represent a mountainous horizon. Obviously, the title of my painting indicates what the painting is about by alluding to Fehr's masking artwork, which itself embodies fugitive Africana in Tate's British collection. However, in addition to the title, elements appropriated from Fehr's masking artwork are visible within the composition of the painting itself, as are other elements that embody the unmasking process: which is why I felt that my *The Rescue of Andromeda* could confidently be understood as a form of critical practice.

In what follows, I attempt to document the steps that led from my encounter with works in Tate's collection to the production of my painting. My documentation duplicates and analyses the chronologically ordered method of research that I set out in Chapter One. I began the process with a critical reading of masked Africana in existing artworks. I then went on to observe the composition of the work in detail, and those observations enabled me to select and appropriate recognisable elements of the work. The appropriated motifs were then synthesised into a new artwork. Finally, I reflected on the critical efficacy of the process.

5.1: Henry Fehr—sculptor of 'The rescue of Andromeda'

Fig. 5.2: Fehr. H., The rescue of Andromeda', 1893. Bronze. Photo by Donkor, K., 2011.

The Rescue of Andromeda (see Fig. 5.2) was created by Henry Charles Fehr in 1893, and the large bronze sculpture, at almost 3 meters high, was purchased by the Chantrey Behest in 1894. This meant that not only was it one of the first two artefacts from the collection that visitors encountered as they approached the museum's Millbank entrance, but it also represented an early addition to the British collection and therefore held a kind of art-historical priority as an item representing the museum's earliest constructions of British artistic identity.

Despite the placing of *The Rescue of Andromeda* near to the entrance of Tate Britain, Fehr seemed comparatively little known to art history: so, when I conducted my research, I was unable to identify any monographs or theses about his work. A search for his name in the British Library Catalogue produced no results (either as the subject, title or content of any documents), and the only results in the National Art Library catalogue of the V&A were three items of correspondence. However, the online database *Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851–1951*, (Mapping, 2011) which was instituted by University

of Glasgow, the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Henry Moore Institute did contain a bibliography of primary source materials, and he was mentioned in some art history books.

From the database, I learnt that Fehr, the south-London born son of an immigrant, Swiss merchant, was a prizewinning student who had received his training at the Royal Academy Schools, and worked as a sculptor for almost fifty years until his retirement at seventy, in 1937. In consequence of such a long career, his many memorials, reliefs, monuments and portraits were distributed across the U.K. They included prestigious commissions, such as the statues and bas-reliefs decorating the facade of the Middlesex Guildhall on Parliament Square—the building that in the 21st century hosted Britian's supreme court.

Marion Spielmann (1858–1948), a leading British critic of the late Victorian period, was cautiously enthusiastic about Fehr. In his 1901 book, *British sculpture and sculptors of today*, he described his art as 'clever' and displaying 'courage', but with a 'certain lack of depth in sentiment'. However, in the years since his death, historical opinion of Fehr's work seems to have been generally unfavourable. Writing in her book about the late-Victorian, 'New Sculpture' movement with which Fehr had been stylistically associated, the art historian Susan Beattie (d.1989) felt that Fehr's *St George and the rescued maiden* (1898) was:

> *A striking example of the abuse of the New Sculpture's delicate symbolist imagery and the misinterpretation of its motives …a double parody of [Antonin] Mercié's Gloria Victis and [Albert] Gilbert's contemplative St George of 1896 for the Clarence Tomb. (Beattie, 1983; 120)*

Similarly, Dennis Farr in his *English Art: 1870–1940* described the same work as 'coarse and banal, if not comic' (1978; 89). Ambiguity about Fehr's practice seemed to have been shared by his peers—he was nominated for election to the Royal Academy in 1893 and again in 1920, but was not admitted.

From 1889–93, Fehr was a studio assistant to the eminent sculptor Thomas Brock (whose work is considered in Chapters 9 and 10) and, whilst reading Brock's correspondence at the National Art Library, I discovered that Brock had acted on Fehr's behalf in arranging insurance for the exhibition of his work to represent the British school in the *Exposition Universelle Internationale de 1900* at Les Palais des Beaux-Arts in Paris (Brock, T., 1900). Prior to that, in 1896, Fehr had also shown at the third exhibition of the liberal art group 'La Libre Esthétique' in Brussells—which, as well as New Sculpture luminary George Frampton (1860–1928), also featured works by Henri Toulouse Lautrec, Camille Pissaro, Pierre Bonnard and Claude Monet (Block, 1994; 282). This indicated to me that Fehr was in touch with some of the avant-garde currents that had been developing in continental European art.

When he had created *The Rescue of Andromeda*, it was as an 'ideal' sculpture, which was the late Victorian term for free-standing, figurative works intended to express general noble ideals through mythological or allegorical figures—as opposed to portrait works intended to memorialise specific noble historical individuals or events. The work was first created in plaster and was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1893 with the title *Perseus and Andromeda* (Spielmann, 1901; 38), before being cast in bronze in the following year when it was purchased 'for the nation' by the Chantrey Bequest.

Spielmann wrote that although the sculpture was 'remarkable' it had 'certain faults'—particularly the 'unfortunate superposition of Perseus on the dragon, and the dragon on Andromeda' (ibid). When the Tate Gallery had opened in 1897, '*The Rescue*' was located in the main sculpture galleries, but Fehr was upset when, in 1911, his work was displaced from inside the Millbank building onto the balcony off to one side of the entrance. Writing to the then Director Charles Aitken, the artist had claimed that being 'turned out of the inside collection' would 'ruin his reputation' (Birchall, 2003). However, when I commenced my research his glossy black monument had been in place for almost 100 years, and was probably one of only two works in the Tate Gallery that had remained at the same location for the entire period.

5.2 Reading Ovid in British art and Tate's encoding of Andromeda artworks

In 2003, Tate's website contextualised *The rescue of Andromeda* through an essay by the Victorian-art specialist and former Tate curator Heather Birchall (Birchall, 2003). She explained that Fehr intended his sculpture as a depiction of the Greek legend in which Perseus (son of Zeus, the father god) saved a beautiful woman from an avenging sea monster. Birchall also informed visitors that the Roman poet Ovid, author of the famous *Metamorphoses*, was the key artistic source for the tale that Fehr translated into bronze. In order to grasp the significance of these professionally encoded curatorial claims, I decided to try and understand what Ovid's poetry has meant for western art.

Ovid, born as the aristocratic Publius Ovidius Naso, (43 BCE –17/18 CE) was a contemporary of Julius Caesar, Marc Antony and Cleopatra, as well as (in Biblical theology) Jesus Christ (Corley, 2009; 111). He wrote poetic texts about Andromeda during the reign of Augustus (63 BCE–14 AD)—first of Rome's emperors—just at the death of the old Republic and the birth of a new era of empire. The dates of Ovid's life, beginning in 'BCE' and ending in 'CE' reminded me that he was active at a time so fundamental to Western culture that it was remembered as the moment when the ordered, international numbering of years began, that is to say, dates in the western calendar, such as '2015', were counted from the momentous events said to have occurred in Ovid's lifetime—as though it were a starting place for all history.

Indeed, so prestigious was that era in western minds that even the best months of the northern temperate regions, July and August, were named after the two dominant figures of Ovid's life, Julius Caesar and Augustus—who were deified by the Romans (Hannah, 2005; 98). According to the translator David Slavitt, when Ovid wrote his major work, *Metamorphoses,* he was already the most famous poet in Roman Europe, North Africa and Western Asia—an artist so prominent in the intellectual life of the empire that the decision to banish him in 8CE to a Black Sea town was taken personally by Augustus himself (Slavitt IN Ovid, 1989; vi).

Metamorphoses, in which the poet related the tale of Andromeda and Perseus amongst hundreds of other myths, was a vast undertaking: a single, vivid, audacious epic that, in modern printed translations, ran to more than 600 pages and had remained in print for hundreds of years in many languages as well as in its original Latin. The classicist Denis Feeney noted how, in its content, the poem was 'an encyclopaedic stock of Greek and Latin literary history' (Feeney IN Ovid, 2004; xiii). Indeed, Ovid's work was so highly regarded in the West that even after one-and-a-half thousand years its pagan texts had survived Medieval Christian fundamentalism and was still 'the main repository of antiquity for the poets of the Middle Ages and Renaissance' (ibid), for whom Latin literacy in a culture dominated by the Roman Catholic Church remained vitally important.

With regard to British artistic identity, Ovid was said to have been a formative influence on canonical English poets like Chaucer, Milton and Spencer (Feeney, 2013). According to the literary historian John W. Velz, Ovid was 'Shakespeare's favourite writer, judging from the number of identifiable allusions to his works in the Shakespeare canon' (Velz IN Taylor, 2000; 185). In my own field, the visual arts, the art historian Nigel Llewellyn[30] has claimed that for Western painters and sculptors from the Renaissance through to the Impressionists, 'a facility with Ovidian myth' was vital 'to achieve success in the higher genres' (Llewellyn IN Martindale, 1990; 160):

> *In short, from the twelfth century onwards Ovid has had a more wide-ranging impact on the art and culture of the West than any other classical poet. (Martindale, 1990; 1)*

Likewise, Feeney too had asserted that:

> *The poem's impact on the visual arts is… so pervasive as to be incalculable, with the names of Titian, Bernini and Rubens only the most obvious ones that first come to mind. (Feeney IN Ovid, 2004; xiii)*

So, in my approach to Fehr's work I was given to understand that his creation of *The Rescue of Andromeda* was by no means a random act of literary or artistic appropriation. Rather, it meant

30. Nigel Llewellyn, incidentally, went on to become Head of Research at the Tate Gallery.

casting himself as a new interlocutor in what he would have considered to be a venerable artistic heritage stretching far across time and space through the historicized Ovidian achievements of Reynolds and Velazquez, Bernini and Michelangelo and into the age of classical antiquity.

However, by the late 19th Century, although the exemplar and prestige of classical imperial forms still held great attraction for European and Euro-imperial culture, Ovid's own reputation had lessened considerably, according to the literary historian Theodore Ziolkowski (Ziolkowski, 2005; 29). Condemned by the likes of Winckelmann and the influential German idealist philosopher Georg Hegel (1737–1831) (ibid), it was Ovid's Roman contemporary, Virgil (70–19, BCE), who, according to the classicist Robert Graves, was deemed a more appropriate artistic archetype for the sober patrician values considered necessary for the new modes of empire (Graves, 1962; 13). In fact, another classicist, Michael Simpson, believed that Ovid's depiction of Perseus was intended as a direct parody of Virgil's Augustan patriotism, stating, 'if there is such a thing as treason, Ovid's [Perseus] would seem to be it' (Simpson, 2003; 310).

Nevertheless, Ovidian themes appeared in the works of several major late-19th-century artists notable for the sensuality of their work, including Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) (Ziolkowski, 2005) and Lord Frederick Leighton (1836–1896). Indeed, Birchall (2003) believed that it was Leighton, President of the Royal Academy during Fehr's attendance at the Academy Schools, who was the primary influence in the younger artist's choice of Andromeda as a subject. Certainly, Leighton's influence on Fehr was noted by Spielmann (1901; 138) who had observed that the most senior British artist 'took a kindly interest' in his putative protégé.

For English sculptors in general, Leighton's influence was profound: the critic Edmund Gosse, writing in *The Art Journal* in 1894, had coined the term 'New Sculpture' to describe what he saw as a lyrical flowering in the English school, and had specifically credited Leighton with inaugurating the movement in 1877 with his dramatic, *Athlete Wrestling a Python* (Gosse, 1894). I agreed with Birchall that Fehr had translated one particular element of his imagery from Leighton's 1891 painting *Perseus and Andromeda,* in which Andromeda was depicted, distinctively, as being under the wing of the monster Cetus—although Fehr had also reversed Leighton's emphasis for the two human figures, so that Perseus rather than Andromeda dominated the scene.

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid's focus had been on the plot of the Perseus and Andromeda myth, and although he had identified the princess as Ethiopian, he did not describe her in detail, other than to note her astonishing beauty and vulnerable nudity (Simpson, 2003; 310).

However, in another of his major works, *Letters of the Heroines*, (or *Heroides*) the poet supplied more information about how he considered the appearance of the maiden, stating that:

> *…Cepheus's dark Andromeda*
> *charmed Perseus with her native colour.*
> *White doves often choose mates of different hue*
> *and the parrot loves the black turtle dove. (Ovid IN McGrath, 1992; 5)*

and again, in yet another epic, *Ars Armandi* (*The art of Love*) the poet claimed that, 'Andromeda's dark complexion was not criticised by Perseus' (Ovid, 2001).

On the other hand, Birchall, in her essay on Fehr's work had appeared oblivious to Ovid's identification of Andromeda as a black, African woman. However, I came to understand that Birchall was only reflecting a long pattern of white racialization that had been adopted by almost all modern European and Euro-American filmmakers, painters and sculptors for hundreds of years. The list of artists who had utilized a white racialization of Andromeda was extraordinarily long, popular and prestigious, and ranged from Piero di Cosimo's (1462–1522) *Perseus Freeing Andromeda* in 1510, through works by Rubens (1577–1640) and Titian, and included the makers of the 1981 Hollywood blockbuster *Clash of the Titans* (starring Judi Bowker alongside Sir Lawrence Olivier)—as well as its 2010 remake (with Alexa Davalos and Liam Neeson).

5.3 Black Andromeda: McGrath and the critical reading of western art

The art historian Elizabeth McGrath in her 1992 essay *The Black Andromeda* had attempted to address and explain the meaning of Ovid's references to the princess's complexion. McGrath was not the first 20th-century writer to draw attention to Andromeda's blackness, as it had been considered briefly by the Jamaica-born, African-American writer Joel Augustus Rogers (1880 –1966) in his 1940 survey of racial attitudes *Sex & Race: Vol I* (Rogers, 1970; 84), and then, again, in 1983 by the African-American classicist F.M. Snowden in his book *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Snowden, 1983; 95). Nevertheless, McGrath was the first modern professional art historian to analyse the iconology of Andromeda's African identity.

What McGrath and Rogers drew my attention to was that from the earliest accounts of the Perseus myth in Homer's *Iliad* (said to have been composed in the 7th Century BCE), until the demise of classical antiquity in the 6th century, Andromeda was consistently identified as the daughter of King Cepheus and Queen Cassiopeia of Ethiopia. Indeed, her Ethiopian identity was so consistent that when Ovid deviated from his own ascription and suggested an eastern, rather than a southern origin, Melville, in his 1986 translation, was compelled to state:

> *Andromeda was* ***in fact*** *Ethiopian, but 'in Latin poetry "Indians" and "Ethiopians" are more or less interchangeable'. [my emphasis] (Ovid, 2008; 216)*

Of course, from an historical perspective Andromeda was a mythical character not an historical one (as far as we know). So, A.D. Melville's assertion seemed to be stretching the boundaries of fiction by implying that she was any more subject to the dictates of 'fact' than the goddess Athena herself. Yet, what Melville meant by 'fact' in this instance was not the everyday, real-life sense of the word, but 'fact' in the sense of classical, literary consistency.

Andromeda was Ethiopian 'in fact' because she was said to be so, not only in the *Metamorphoses*, but also in the works of Homer and the plays of Sophocles (c. 497–406 BCE) and Euripides (c. 480–406 BCE), as well as in the first-or-second century BCE book, the so-called *pseudo-Apollodorus Library*—which functioned as a prose compilation of mythological narratives (Simpson, 1976; 73)[31]. Thus, McGrath had pointed out that it was a significant artistic, aesthetic, national and racial contradiction that for thousands of years, most (but not all) European visual artists had depicted Andromeda as a pale-skinned, often blonde or auburn-haired European woman—despite the fact that the primary classical source written by 'the greatest of all mythographers' described her as a dark-skinned, Ethiopian woman.

In fact, I thought that Fehr's *Andromeda* was unusual amongst European depictions in that the entire bronze (including all four mythological figures) had been given a jet-black patina, probably achieved using a process involving either liver of sulphur or ammonium sulphide. There was a certain 'technical' irony to this, because it had meant that in the translation from plaster to bronze, Fehr's *Andromeda* had made a metamorphosis, literally speaking, from white to black. Furthermore, in terms of considering either her beauty or her 'race' (both deemed significant in the myth), it was virtually impossible for the ordinary viewer to see 'Andromeda's' face except in profile—due to the height of the plinth and its present location.

In considering Fehr's work in the context of Tate's British art collection, I discovered, using the museum's online database, that the collection held nine artworks in which 'Andromeda' formed part of the title or catalogue entry. They included the following: two 1798 colour studies on paper by J.M.W. Turner R.A. (1775–1851); A drawing and a gouache painting *The rock of Doom* (1874–5) by Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones A.R.A. (1833–1898); A woodcut 1843 engraving by John Linnell (1792–1882); An abstract 1962 painting, *Andromeda,* by Alexander Liberman (1912–1999); A 1937–8 painting, *Neptune and Andromeda,* by Alexandre Jacovleff (1887–1938); and a 1936 collage, *Perseus and Andromeda,* by David Gascoyne (1916–2001)—as

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31. The classical historian Daniel Ogden, in his historiography of ancient Perseus mythology, has written that Andromeda's homeland was a significant 'point of instability' in the transmission of the narrative with later, Hellenic texts naming sites from Joppa in the modern state of Israel to India (Ogden, 2008: 82). However, Ogden was also clear that, from at least the 5th century BC (which is when many of the major, surviving classical texts were set to writing), 'Ethiopia was to remain the favoured setting for literary accounts of the Andromeda episode' (ibid; 83).

well as Fehr's sculpture. In addition, the painting *Andromeda* by Sir Edward Poynter had been on loan from a private collection following the 2001–2 exhibition *Exposed: The Victorian Nude*—although, by 2011 it had been sold at auction and was no longer on display. So, Tate's *Andromeda* works ranged in method from Romantic to Pre-Raphaelite and from minimalism to surrealism—with the earliest produced in 1798 and the most recent in 1962. Of the figurative works, most conformed to a pale-skinned stereotype: Burne-Jones's Tate work's were preparatory studies for his major paintings of Andromeda, *The Rock of Doom* (1888) and *The Doom Fulfilled* (1885). Both depicted Andromeda as remarkably pale—paler, in fact, than Perseus—with auburn hair. It seemed likely that British figurative artists tacitly intended that their Andromedas would assuredly *not* be perceived as an Ethiopian woman—even if, as in Burne-Jones case, overt Africana was visibly celebrated in his other works such as *The King and the Beggar Maid* (1884) or *Star of Bethlehem* (1885–1890).

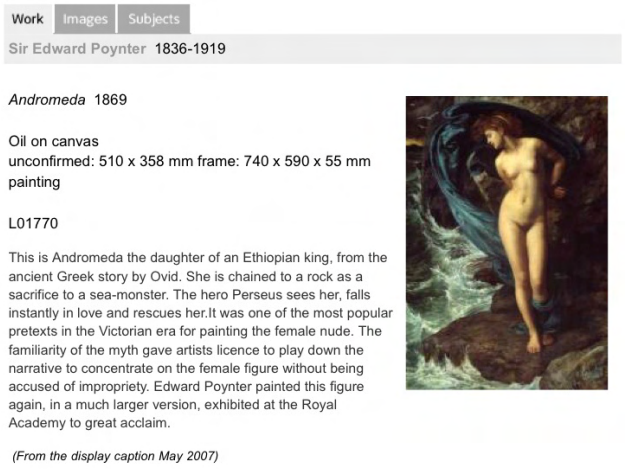

Fig. 5.3: Tate, 2007, website page for Sir Edward Poynter's 'Andromeda' (1869) with a gendered explanation of her depiction. [Accessed 25 March, 2011].

McGrath began her meticulous consideration of the black Andromeda with the suggestion that white Andromedas had never been either incidental nor accidental. As early as the 3rd Century C.E., the post-Hellenistic writer Heliodorus (from Homs in Syria) had written a romantic novel, *Aethiopica* (*The Ethiopian Story*), in which his entire complex plot revolved around the historical contradiction that, although Andromeda was supposedly from an African, Ethiopian and black family and country, painters had usually depicted her as white.[32]

32. By the time Heliodorus was writing, in the 2nd Century AD, the classical tradition for depicting Andromeda as looking like a European Greek, but living in an African context, seemed to have been in place for at least half-a-millennium. This was evidenced by, for example, a red-figured, water vase held in the British Museum that depicted Andromeda and which had been dated to c.440 BCE Attica (catalogue number. 1843,1103.24). Writing about the vase in the 1896 *Catalogue of Vases in the British Museum,* Cecil Smith noted that 'The Ethiopians throughout (except Kepheus and Andromeda) have woolly hair, flat nose and thick lips. Kepheus and Andromeda are of the usual Greek type' (Smith, C., 1896). In 2015, the British Museum website caption for the vase reproduced Smith's text in full—minus his ethnocentric racialization of the Ethiopian figures. (Smith, C. Accessed, 2015).

During the 16th Century, *Aethiopica* was translated and published in France, Holland and England, (McGrath, 1992; 1) ensuring that the racial contradiction and its mysteries were more widely known. McGrath traced the contours of a post-renaissance, pan-European, literary and artistic debate in which, the participants considered how to racialize the legendary Queen of Mycenae[33] as white: that is, they considered whether it was iconographically correct to sustain her 'metamorphosis' into a white identity. She noted that a few Renaissance artists and writers, finding inspiration in the Ovidian and other descriptions, did decide to depict Andromeda as having a black identity. However, the few who who did so faced censure in a process which McGrath described pointedly as 'the suppression of the black Andromeda' (ibid; 16):

> *As far as I am aware no artist followed Diepenbeeck and Johann Joachim von Sandrart [1698] in depicting Andromeda as black. (ibid; 15)*

In my contextual reading of Ovid, Perseus's adventures in Africa—and the poet's affirmation of Andromeda's black identity—might not have been received by the elite Roman public as simply incidental 'exotica'. Perseus's adventures in Africa were said by the ancient legends to have begun in what is now modern-day Morocco, where he defeated two foes: first the Gorgon Medusa; and then the Titan Atlas (whose name corresponded to that of the region's mountain range). From this western extremity he flew across Libya (the modern state bears a name that was in use in antiquity) before rescuing Andromeda in Ethiopia (Ovid, 2004).

I speculated whether first-century Romans might have understood this as having contemporary, allegorical relevance—as a poetic, retrospective 'prophecy' of the Republic's gradual conquest of the African coastal regions of the mediterranean (or possibly as a satirical mockery of those events). After defeating Antony and Cleopatra, Augustus was the first ruler to extend Roman dominion from the moorish far west, all the way to Egypt's border with 'Ethiopia', that is, to its border with the Nile kingdom of Kush in the south east (Welsby, 1994; 47). It seemed to me that, however they interpreted his work, Ovid's readers might have been sensitized to the fact that both Julius Caesar and Antony (Augustus's predecessors) had, like the mythological Perseus, been the lovers of a very real, historical, African/Greek royal princess—that is to say, the Roman leaders had been the consorts of Queen Cleopatra[34].

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33. After Perseus married Andromeda, the pair became the mythological founding king and queen of the city state of Mycenae. Today, Mycenae is an archaeological site in the north-eastern Peloponnese of Greece, with artefacts demonstrating that between 1600 and 1100BC it was one of the primary centres of Aegean trade and settlement (Schofield, 2007). However, beyond prosaic texts associated with day-to-day life, no Mycenaean, mythological literature has yet been discovered, so the Perseus/Andromeda myth belongs properly to a later, literary culture, that of Classical Greece, from approximately 700BC onwards (Ogden, 2008).

34. In 8CE, Ovid was exiled by Augustus to the Black Sea port of Tomis for reasons now unknown—although, the poet often wrote about his punishment, and sought forgiveness through his verse. There has subsequently been much speculation about whether or how his poetry had caused offence. See Barbar Levick (2014) for an overview of scholarship seeking satirical or political interpretations for Ovid in relation to Augustus.

Thus, there seemed to be distinct ways in which the Andromeda myth could be interpreted as analogous to the major events of Ovidian contemporary society. Ovid's invocation of Perseus's conquests in Africa might well have been received in a similar allegorical vein to the work of Virgil, his poetic rival—who had invoked the affair of his own hero, Aeneas, with the mythical African queen Dido of Carthage (Virgil, 2003)[35]. Virgil's narrative seemed to have served as a kind of retrospective, poeticized 'prophecy' for Rome's eventual defeat of Carthage in 202 BCE, which was arguably the most significant event in Rome's imperial history before the age of Caesar and Augustus.

I also thought that Ovid's elite Roman readers might have been well aware of the contemporary war in which Augustus had established Roman-Egypt's southern border with the independent (but weakened) 'Ethiopian' state of Kush (Welsby, 1998; 70). Consequently, my own reading of Ovid caused me to view the long, racially motivated, artistic suppression of Andromeda's black and African identity as even more perverse than McGrath suggested—because the acts of suppression had occluded not just the mythological content, but also the historical context of the Ovidian poetry that was being invoked in art.

Summary of my Black Andromeda critical readings

Before my enquiry had even entered Tate Britain's front door, the museum's purportedly British identity was replete with signs from overseas on its facade: such as its Roman and Greek architecture, a Greek unicorn—and a lion. One of the first two artworks that visitors encountered by the entrance to the National Collection of British Art had been the Swiss-immigrant-born Fehr's interpretation of a Latin version of a Greek myth set predominantly in Africa, in which the Greek hero rescued and married an Ethiopian princess. Although the princess's mythical, Africana identity was refused visually within the collection, (it was mentioned in some curatorial texts), my enquiry pointed to a permeability about the concept of what constituted the museum's notion of a national British identity. Far from being insular, as seemingly implied by the phrase 'home of British art', it was an identity that had assimilated foreign and ancient cultures—yet, by embracing the white Andromeda tradition, it also seemed resistant to the depiction of a specific, mythological concept of black royalty. Because of its immediate presence as I entered the museum, I decided the Andromeda myth would constitute my first assignment for the practice-led enquiry into unmasking fugitive Africana in the National Collection of British Art.

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35. Virgil's major work, *The Aeneid* (29–19BCE), recited the legend of Aeneas, a nobleman from Troy who supposedly fled the Greek conquest and, having avoided marriage to Dido, settled in Italy where he seemed destined to father the dynasty that eventually founded Rome. The Julii family (of Julius Caesar and Augustus) claimed to be descendants of Aeneas. Like Perseus, Aeneas was also thought to be a the child of a deity—Venus, the goddess of love.

CHAPTER 6: MAKING MY 'RESCUE OF ANDROMEDA': APPROPRIATION AND SYNTHESIS

Introduction

My readings of Elizabeth McGrath's *Black Andromeda* had constituted an important and essential element of the investigative practice of unmasking fugitive Africana, because it was only by my reading of art historical and museological texts that I was artistically empowered to perceive, beyond the visible surface of existing artworks, that network of narratives and agencies which animated their production. That is, my critical reading empowered me to research the iconological 'conditions of existence' of an artwork. What follows considers how I applied the logic of McGrath's thesis to Tate's collection, and to the three further phases of investigation that the collection generated. The process began with my search for Tate's Andromedas and continued through to the production of digital images and eventually an oil painting titled *The rescue of Andromeda* (Donkor, 2011).

6.1 Observations at Tate: locating and picturing Andromeda

Before commencing this enquiry, I had not been consciously aware of any Andromeda artworks in Tate's British collection. McGrath's text did not speak of any British Andromedas, only those by Dutch, Flemish, German and Italian artists (McGrath 1992). In consequence, my first critical act of the unmasking investigation was to ask: did the British Art Collection hold any works informed by the Andromeda myth?

By entering the term 'Andromeda' into the Tate website's online search engine, I produced results for the ten works I identified in Chapter 5. All the results included images. Additional searches were conducted for other elements relevant to the myth: Nereids, Perseus, Neptune/Poseidon, Medusa, Cetus, Gorgon, Jove/Jupiter/Zeus, Cassiopeia, Phineus, Atlas and Cephus. These searches found more artworks, but no identifiable Andromeda figures.

6.2 Documenting my observations of Tate's Andromeda artworks

Having located the online references to Tate's British, Andromeda artworks, the next stage was to ask: which of the ten offered the best 'unmasking' potential? My initial enquiry indicated that one was quite literally in a unique position: the Henry Fehr sculpture was on permanent display and, because of its age and location, there were no image permission issues (such as copyright or photography restrictions), and nor were there any physical access problems. Normally, access to the scuplture is on a 24-hour-basis as the balcony site is an open, public space. If I needed to reopen a particular line of enquiry, I could do so at short notice and with fewer obstacles than with galleries or storerooms. The other advantage of its open availability was that the sculpture could function as a physical reference for viewers of this project. Because unmasked Africana necessarily exists in a dialogic relationship to a pre-

existing artwork, greater availability raised its relational possibilities, allowing visitors to discover, affirm, query or refute their own perceptions of fugitive Africana.

My onsite study began with observational drawings, using a pencil and sketchpad, working in the single-point-perspective, scopic idiom. Despite round-the-clock access, one early problem was the elevated and cramped position of the balcony where the sculpture was installed: it was four meters above ground level, surrounded by heavy stone balustrade. In order to calculate the relative proportions of the sculpture (for the purposes of appropriation as an observing artist), I needed to find a position far enough away to eliminate perspective effects, but where my vision was not obscured by banners, balustrades or the building. Circumnavigating the sculpture on the balcony was an intimately close encounter, forcing me to look sharply upwards at Perseus and Medusa. The resulting effects of perspective were probably intended by Fehr to generate a sense of awe in viewers.

The towering, naked, and entirely black young man—lithely built, but athletically muscular, seemed to impose a sense of hyper-masculine physical dominance, given that he balanced with one foot on the back of a dragon. The display of a huge sword in one outstretched hand and a severed human head in the other evoked extreme violence, but also Goethe's association of Medusa with desire (Goethe, 1999; 235) and Freud's with castration (Garber, 2003). Just above the visitor's eye-level was the terrifying Cetus, part-reptile, part-bat, with predatory claws and outspread wings. Its jaws were filled with crocodile-like teeth and it seemed to be both menacing and shielding the naked, slightly built Andromeda, whose gestures suggested terror and vulnerability. Chained by her ankles to the sculpted rock on which she squirmed prostrate, her discarded robe was draped beneath her. She could not see Perseus because the wing of the beast overshadowed her and also shielded her vision from the Gorgon. Every surface was smooth, glossy and almost uniformly black. The scuplture was crafted in just enough detail to be plausible, yet there was not a single raised vein to indicate effort, which thereby prevented our perception of the figures from lurching into the everyday.

This head-reeling sight made it difficult to understand why phrases like 'Victorian values', 'stuffiness' and a 'stiff upper lip' could have entered let alone sustained a place in public consciousness. Instead of drawing-room restraint or courtly manners, the visitor was confronted with rage, terror, gruesome death and a monstrous Other. All four tormented beings seemed entangled in an endless typhoon of desperation, violence and desire. It seemed not so much a rescue as an eternal nightmare. I felt the need to step back, as if, even in a sunny, outdoor space by the river and highway, there was a danger of claustrophobia. Would this spectacular drama be too overwhelming to facilitate a critical unmasking of the fugitive

Ethiopian Andromeda? My observational studies through drawing and photography seemed to help unveil some of the power of Fehr's art.

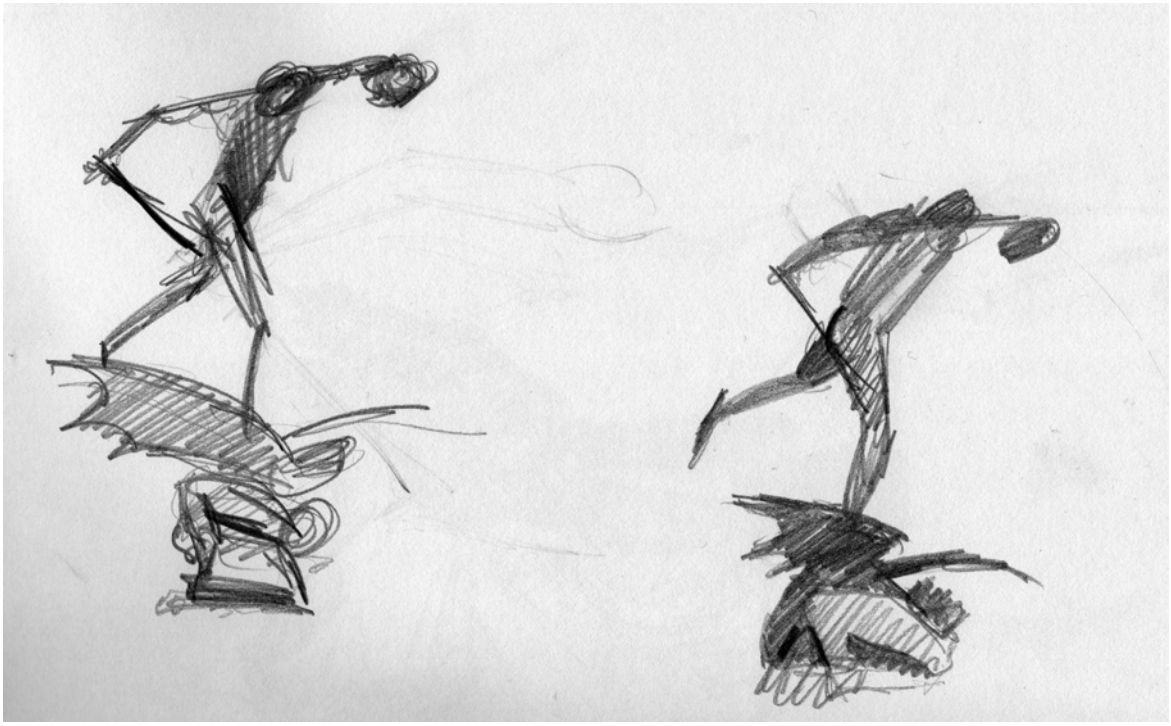

Fig. 6.1: Donkor, K., 2011. 'Study of Fehr's Rescue of Andromeda'. Pencil on paper.

To find a clear vantage point to draw the sketches in fig. 6.1, I needed a horizontal plane of vision and so had to situate myself on the other side of the Millbank highway. My enquiry in these first two sketches created rapid, boldly marked studies that were designed to quickly understand the overall scale and proportions of the sculpture. The drawings revealed that one source of the physical aura of the work lay in Fehr's dramatic scaling of his figures. Perseus was gigantic by comparison to Andromeda—perhaps a similar disparity in scale to that in Pierre Puget's 1684 marble sculpture (Puget, 1684). Her size was as a child to an adult. The hero also dwarfed the monster Cetus. At close quarters, this scaling disparity forestalled the expected diminution in size as Perseus extends in perspective above the viewer. Instead of appearing smaller than Andromeda to a viewer standing in close proximity, he continued to appear outsized—dominating the scene.

Fig. 6.2: Donkor, K., 2011. 'Study of Fehr's Rescue of Andromeda. I'. Pencil on paper.

To draw the sculpture from its front, I moved into the museum's front garden. From there, Perseus's hunched stance appeared more menacing, his sword aimed directly at Cetus's jaws. The hero's head leaned and twisted around slightly as though giving himself time and space to apprehend his opponent. In this subtle gesture, I sensed great confidence in his invincibility as the son of god (Zeus). Andromeda seemed crushed beneath the expanse of Cetus wing. My marks only discovered the wing in outline, as though I too was resisting the monstrous form's presence.

Fig. 6.3: Donkor, K., 2011. 'Study of Fehr's Rescue of Andromeda.' II'. Pencil on paper.

Fig. 6.4: Fehr, C. 1893. 'The Rescue of Andromeda'. Photo by Donkor, K., 2011

Cetus's surprise was evident because his head turned completely around, indicating the realisation that Perseus had approached from behind. Perhaps, it was this turning that gave the sculpture some of its 'moral' ambiguity: Perseus was to Cetus as Cetus was to Andromeda—a predator. Perseus did not 'play fair' by the rules of chivalry, as none existed between demi-god and monster. What united Perseus and Andromeda was not morality in the Christian sense of selflessness, but race: they perceived themselves as an immanent primordial Same, whilst Cetus and Medusa were Other. Cetus resisted the couple's desire to merge into a common identity. Yet, in their motivations, all three seemed interchangeable. Cetus desired to kill Andromeda, Andromeda and Perseus desired the death of Cetus. In moral terms, the Other was thus rendered Same. What counts was not a struggle of good with evil, but of a post-Darwinian 'will to power', as formulated by Fehr's contemporary, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900):

> *Let us admit to ourselves unflinchingly how every higher culture on earth has hitherto begun! [With men] of a still natural nature, barbarians in every fearful sense of the word, men of prey still in possession of an unbroken strength of will and lust for power [who] hurled themselves upon weaker… races (Neitzsche, 2003; 192).*

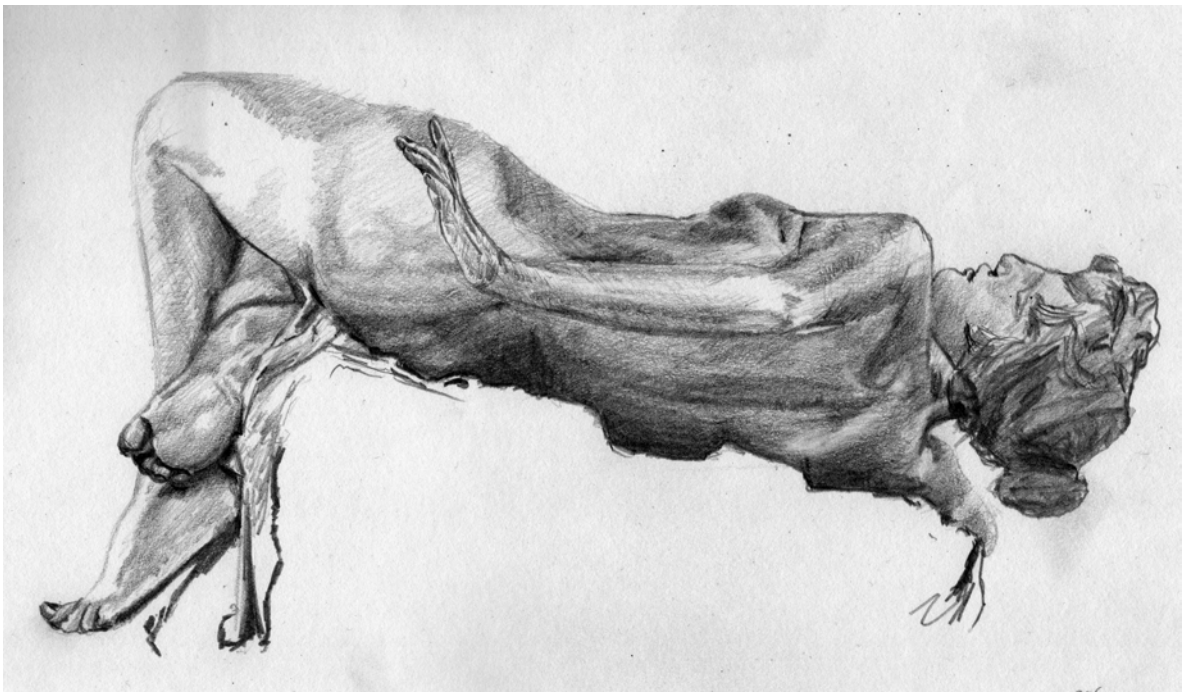

Fig. 6.5: Donkor, K., 'Study of Fehr's Rescue of Andromeda' III. 2011, pencil on paper..

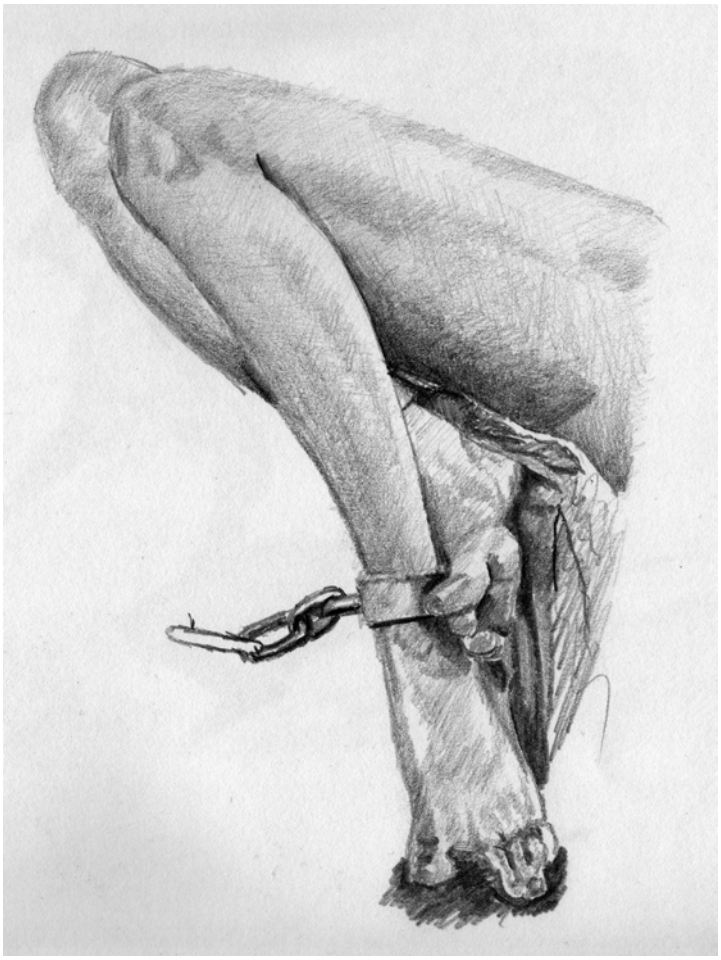

Fig. 6.6: 'Donkor, K., Study of Fehr's Rescue of Andromeda IV. 2011, pencil on paper..

Fig. 6.7:. Left to right: Andromeda, Perseus and Medusa by Fehr. Photos, Donkor, K., 2011

At my studio, I assessed the photographs and drawings made at the museum alongside The Tate's online representations, to decide which Tate Andromeda artworks, if any, would be appropriate for my project. In terms of its racial identity cues, Fehr's work was more ambiguous than the other Tate 'Andromeda' works. This was on account of its black patina which meant that it was not possible to state, from the work alone, whether the human figures were intended to represent a tropical or a temperate complexion. In any case, theories of racial geography such as that put forward by the genetic scientist Neil Risch (Risch, 2002) have been shown by other geneticists—such as David Witherspoon (Witherspoon, 2007)—to break down in the face of diversity and contiguity in human communities, thereby refuting attempts to make scientifically valid categorisations—and Fehr's Andromeda did not seem to be so easily placed in those categories as other Tate works were. (And, to be clear: in ways similar to philosopher Kwame Appiah (b1954), writing in *The illusions of race* (1998), I did not think it feasible that a person's moral character, cultural affinity or intellectual capacity could ever be deduced from any conceivable so-called 'racial', physical morphology—such as complexion, nose shape, hair texture or mouth shape, etc, etc. And, in addition, these conclusions were analogous to my thoughts about gendered physical morphologies too.)

Nevertheless, I thought Fehr had created signifiers to associate Andromeda's gendered identity with signs of vulnerability. Her gender identity was signalled by: a hairstyle corresponding to female figures in ancient Roman art; a barely visible, but apparently feminine left breast; the upwards flexion of her wrists, intended to suggest the patriarchal ideology of feminine delicacy; and, the Ovidian title of the work, naming her as a female figure (albeit with a literally androgynous name). Otherwise, the victim's physique seemed almost gender ambiguous. Fehr's concern with 'race' seemed to have been to distinguish between the human race and the inhuman Cetus. Medusa was presented as human in appearance, but was

mythically 'known' to be monstrous in her effects—which gave Perseus the license to kill her and then exploit her body and image. Female figures were doubly victimized in Fehr's work.

The other Tate Andromedas, which were all either drawings or paintings, tended to give stronger signals that the figures were intended to have a white rather than black identity. All of their tonality was comparatively pale, with the Poynter painting having the clearest series of racially prescriptive identifiers (although, it was not in the permanent collection). This made the Poynter a particularly strong candidate for further enquiry within the unmasking Africana framework. Nevertheless, the Poynter, Turner and Burne Jones Andromeda figures were all solitary within the frame of the work, which meant that the narratively productive victim/villain/hero drama triangle was absent or only implied. Of those works that did include groups, Linnell's print and the Gascoyne painting both represented Perseus and Andromeda figures together, whilst the Jacovleff painting was only assumed to represent Andromeda. The Gascoyne work's surrealist signifiers suggested that its references to the Andromeda myth were less about the myth itself than the unconscious implications of its retelling.

It was clear that the Fehr sculpture had certain key advantages that made it particularly suitable for further enquiry. In consequence, I decided to continue the process of unmasking Africana by focussing on Henry Fehr's '*Rescue*…'.

6.3 The first unmasking project: Andromeda and Nanny of the Maroons

After having made the sketches and photographs of the sculpture, my next experimental proposal was to take its narrative potential and, rather than consider it entirely on its own terms, attempt to integrate the enquiry into my critical practice. Prior to this research, I had been working on a series of paintings, *Queens of the Undead,* which depicted events in the biographies of four historical Africana women who were all perceived as national heroines. One of them, an 18th-century woman called 'Nanny of the Maroons', was remembered in Jamaica as a military and civic leader who led a rural community of former slaves in their guerilla resistance to British counter-insurgency operations (Sherlock 1998). In thinking about ways in which I might challenge the complacent, racialized depictions of Andromeda, I asked myself, intuitively, whether one radical method of critically unmasking the Andromeda myth might be to translate the narrative to a parallel Africana scenario and introduce a black woman, Nanny, as Andromeda's rescuer figure?

Although Nanny of the Maroons was a historical character attested to in documentary accounts, her fugitive circumstances in an enslaving plantation economy meant that, according to the historian Karla Gottlieb, her primary archive resided in the oral history and archaeology

of the contemporary Maroon communities and sites (Gottlieb, 2000). Some memories of Nanny had a spiritual or religious character and were thereby analogous to the role that myth and poetry played in Hellenic and Roman society, through, for example, Ovid's poetry (Herbert-Brown 2002; 98). I thought that the Nanny of the Maroons story in contemporary Jamaican culture represented a legendary foundation of national heroism which functioned analogously to the way ancient, Hellenic society seemed to regard Perseus and Andromeda: as a heroic, foundational community from a remote, or lost age. The two stories shared interchangeable dramatic roles of: rescuer played by Nanny; persecutor by the British state and slavers; and victim by enslaved people. In part, this signifying of translation would be accomplished by emphasising multiple Ovidian metamorphoses, such as the gender and geographical translation of the Hellenic man Perseus into a Jamaican woman—Nanny.

6.4 3D design and digitization for The Rescue of Andromeda

Because comprehensive observation of Fehr's entire sculpture in-situ had already proved physically challenging, I wondered if a more effective appropriation of the visual resemblances necessary for critical unmasking could be achieved by recreating its three-dimensionality in a virtual space? If so, this would allow me to analyse the artistic possibilities of Fehr's sculptural forms from infinitely more visual perspectives than was available from the photographs and sketches. It was this kind of analysis that I thought Richard Arnheim was referring to as 'visual thinking' (Arnheim 1968), meaning, to analyse the world of perceptions in a perceptual manner, rather than in a textual manner.

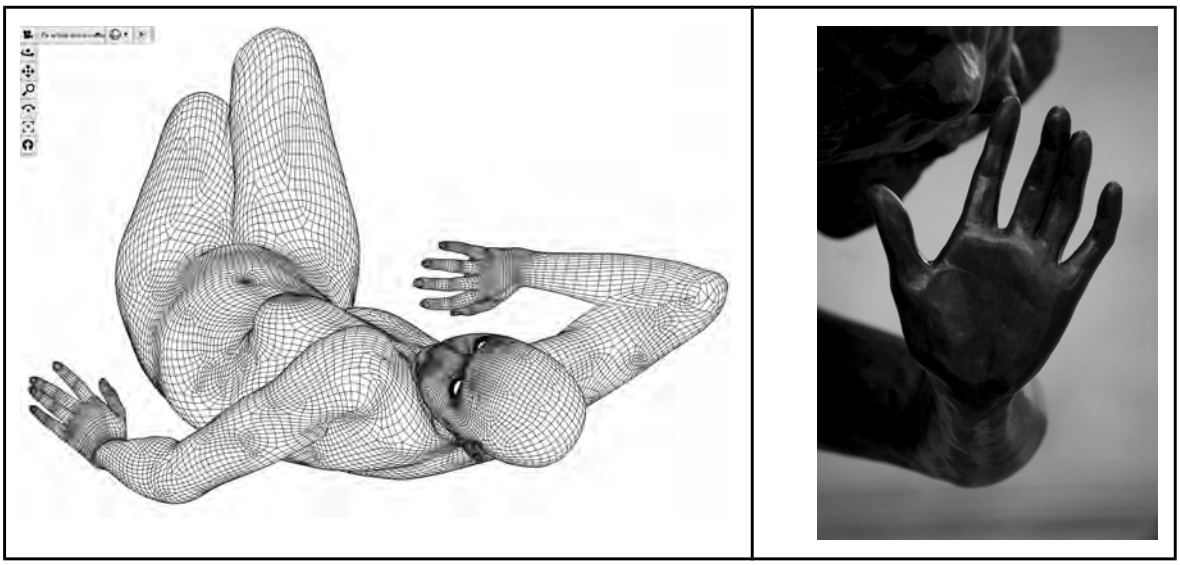

Fig. 6.8: Left. Donkor, K., Andromeda. 2011, digital 3D design. Right. Fehr, H., 'Rescue of Andromeda' 1893. bronze. Photograph by Donkor, K., 2011

My work to translate the studies that I had acquired through my photographs and sketches into a virtual 3D object was an intensive, analytic process that required me to perceptually map

the topography of the 2D forms onto my digital 3D figures. It meant that I had to geometrically triangulate photographic and drawn forms with each other, in order to produce the most precise translations. Fig, 6.8 illustrates an example in which, the precise angle of flexion of the Andromeda figure's left wrist and the gesture of her fingers has been mapped from photographs into the 3D figure. The process was repeated for the articulation of every joint in the body of the original figure, as documented in my photographs and sketches. The process of translation was also repeated for the Perseus figure, but with the substitution of a female form representing the Nanny character for the male signifiers in Fehr's original Perseus figure (see Fig. 6.9, below).

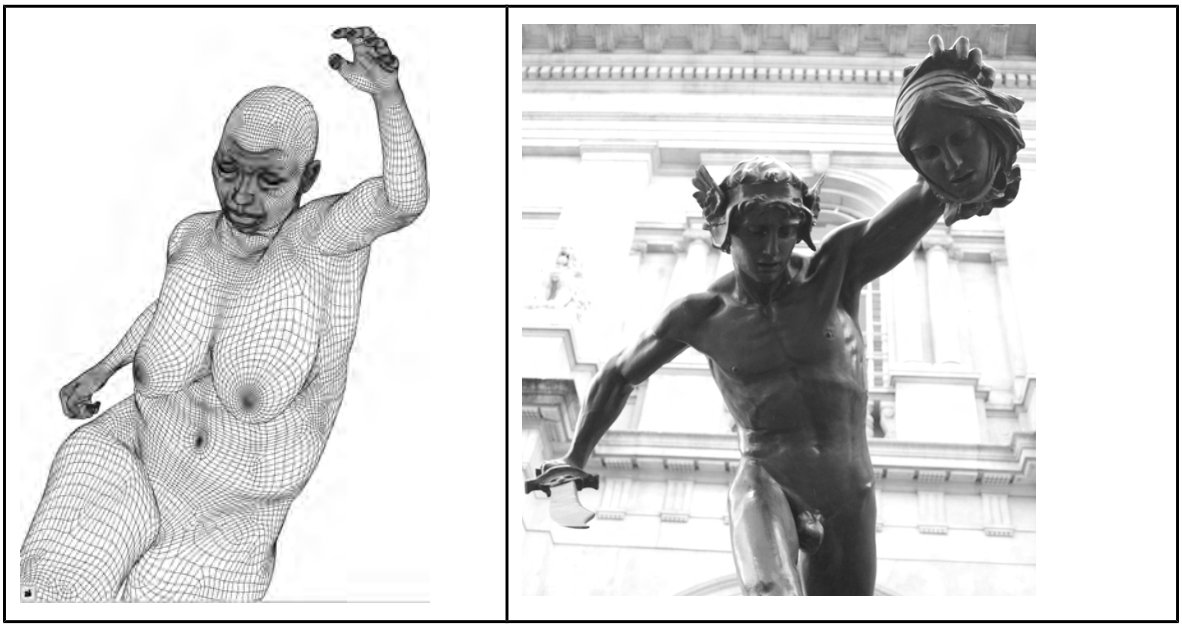

Fig. 6.9: Left: Donkor, K., 'Nanny'. 2011, digital 3D design. Right, Fehr, H., 'Rescue of Andromeda' 1893. bronze. Photograph by Donkor, K., 2011.

Having mapped the two principal human figures from Fehr's sculpture, I was then faced with a choice of whether or not to recreate the Cetus dragon figure. Would a mythical dragon from within Fehr's gothic, English imagination be able to survive translation into the hyper-modern rationalism that characterised the political economy of plantation slavery? Or, would such a fantasy creature drown out the necessary historicity of the Nanny story, which was already perceived as semi-legendary? In 2011, I reasoned that Hollywood films had already demonstrated a tendency to infantilize the history of enslaved African peoples through complacent horror movies like *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). I didn't want my work to be associated with such a trend, and asked myself whether it would be better if I were to translate the demonic, Cetus character into a human figure that could metonymically represent the most tangible 'dragons' in the Africana memory of Caribbean history, namely the white slaveholders.

Although it would have been possible to work with either type of figure, I decided that leaving the Cetus character as a literal dragon would tend to shift the narrative tone of the Nanny figure too far from her function as a historiographical character, towards an entirely mythical role. As a result of this process of artistic, imaginative reasoning, my next act of visual translation was to transform Fehr's dragon into a bourgeois, white man. To complete all four of Henry Fehr's Ovidian characters, I added a decapitated head grasped by Nanny in the same manner that Perseus wielded Medusa. From this point, I started to move the figures through a virtual-3D space in order to compose a mis-en-scene using the four figures: Nanny, Medusa, Andromeda and Cetus.

Fig. 6.10. Donkor. K., 'Andromeda, Nanny, Cetus and Medusa'. 2011, digital painting.

6.5 A digital composition: 'Andromeda, Nanny, Cetus and Medusa'

Four figures, each of which had an analogous role to those in Fehr's statue, were included in my new unmasked Africana work. I had metamorphosed their gender identities, species,

costume and spatial relationships, translating the outdoor setting into an interior and giving my figures contemporary, western dress. However, I did retain the gestures and postures of Fehr's figures, giving my new work a sense of its direct figurative genealogy—that is to say, my figures all had visual resemblances to Fehr's prototypes. I intended that my series of translations and metamorphoses could be be read as both a response to and yet, also, a break with the previous tradition of translations that had erased Andromeda's 'blackness' (McGrath, 1993).

My Andromeda figure was metamorphosed into a persona whose jeans, trainers and hairstyle would situate the mis-en-scene within a contemporary, 21st-century moment that resisted the stylistic, cultural claims of the ancient world on the narrative. Historically, most representations of Andromeda (except, in the 'child-friendly' *Clash of the Titans* movies of 1981 & 2010) had been unclothed, as was demanded by Ovid and his predecessors. Tate's online summary for Poynter's 1869 painting had claimed that unclothed Andromedas in the Victorian era were a 'pretext' for making eroticized female bodies available to the gaze of art spectators—in a legitimized context of mythological discourse (Tate, 2007). The eroticization occurred because she was already prefigured as beautiful, disrobed, desirable, vulnerable and available in the Ovidian myth, which centred the desiring, male hero as her all-powerful rescuer.

Consequently, presenting my Andromeda as clothed made her (as far as I knew) the first clothed depiction in British fine art. In this respect, my work drew attention to, but refused to be complicit in, the objectifying process inherent in the traditional strategy, by which, Andromeda models were, as described by Griselda Pollock:

> *disrobed to be painted in that condition which we call art—but which is just another site of power where your human identity can be diminished by the exposure of your vulnerable body to a costumed and protected gaze…(Pollock, 1999; 299)*

My Cetus figure wore a lounge suit which, in western society, symbolized the conventional uniform of hegemonic, ordering power embodied by figures of commercial, political and financial management. I intended the mode of dress, in this instance, to function, as in the satirical, Weimar-Republic images of George Grosz (1893–1959), to be potentially symbolic of the same, predatory, commercial ethos, which had also brought the Maroon resistance of Nanny into being.

I also translated Fehr's sacrificial rock into a bed, which I intended to symbolize a site of the countless rapes of African women by European 'masters' during the slave era. The most complete account of such behaviour was documented in the 37-volume, 10,000-page diaries of the English, slave-camp overseer, Thomas Thistlewood (1721–1786) (Burnard, 2004; Hall, 1999). Over the course of a 40-year period, Thistlewood meticulously documented 3,852

rapes which he inflicted on 138 of his African, female captives (Burnard, 156). Thistlewood's journal made it clear that such behaviour was considered normal amongst the white, ruling classes of the West Indian slave labour camps. However, there was very little in my image to denote that such an atrocity by the suited figure was, actually, about to occur.

One of the things, which I came to understand about Andromeda artworks in general, was that if a viewer was to recognise fixed roles for a figure as rescuer, victim or villain, then that viewer also needed to have prior identification of the narrative. In my critical readings about the psychological implications of the myth, I had learnt that the Perseus/Andromeda/Cetus/Medusa relationship could be decoded as one articulation of the dysfunctional 'drama triangle', which was described by the psychotherapist Stephen Karpman in his 1968 essay *Fairy Tales and Script Drama Analysis*. Karpman had suggested that figures in fairy tales with 'identity roles' (such as Red Riding Hood) always took up 'action roles' which corresponded to the dramatic tropes Rescuer, Victim or Persecutor. Karpman observed the inherent interchangeability of action roles and hypothesized that dramatic intensity in a 'script' (by which, he meant psychological dysfunction in a patient's life-story) was determined by the frequency of action-role swaps. Thus, in the myth, Andromeda began as a victim of Cetus but, in appealing to her rescuer Perseus, she swaps her victim role in order to jointly persecute Cetus. Perseus, Medusa and Cetus each make similar swaps, and each of these are available to be identified by viewers of artworks.

Therefore, I reasoned that for a viewer to 'fix' the 'action roles' of figures in an *Andromeda* artwork, it did, in fact, require the viewer to already possess a 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984) that was rooted in the privileges of an elitist, classical education. Without the presence of a literal dragon, the dramatic triangle in my work seemed even more ambiguous and unstable in its narrative potential. I questioned whether it was, in fact, the woman carrying a decapitated head who was the 'villain'? Perhaps it was the girl on the bed? Perhaps it was the decapitated figure?

My Nanny, like Fehr's Perseus, held an implement in one hand: in my version it was the abeng, Nanny's legendary cattle horn which had been used by Maroon guerillas to signal over distances (Gottleib, 2003). The Gorgon, Medusa, had been translated into the image of a dreadlocked-man's severed head (intended as a self-portrait) and which, I hoped, would anchor the story in Nanny's Jamaica, where dreadlocks were strongly associated with the indigenous, Rastafari faith.[36] Ovid had relayed the tradition that, when Perseus flew over Libya from the Atlas mountains, blood from Medusa dripped and metamorphosed into poisonous serpents,

36. Coincidently, one of the most popular, Jamaican dancehall entertainers of the 1990s, with the stage name, Ninjaman, also used the alias Don Gorgon. (Stolzoff, N.C., 2000; 108)

thereby deepening the story's links with Africa—which was known in European antiquity for its exotic abundance of snakes (Ovid, 2004). I had intended that my self-personification as Medusa would indicate that the primary focus of my work was its multiple translations and roles through which the various figures function.

Another set of motifs that were intended to emphasize the primacy of artistic translation in the work, that is to say, of my unmasking Africana, appeared on the wall in the background of the image. I had placed a design composed of national flags from some of the contemporary countries through which my Andromeda narrative had been metamorphosed across the ages: Greece (Perseus), Ethiopia (Andromeda), Britain (Fehr/Donkor), Jamaica (Nanny) and Italy (Ovid). Additionally, my Cetus figure was pictured as having just dropped an appropriated, pulp-fiction magazine cover. By this gesture, I intended to query—just as, perhaps, Ovid had hinted through his satirical absurdities—whether the Andromeda story was really anything more than a cheesy melodrama selling itself on the rusty aura of a ruling class that vanished more than 1500 years ago?

6.6 The second Andromeda project: Nanny and Andromeda abstractions

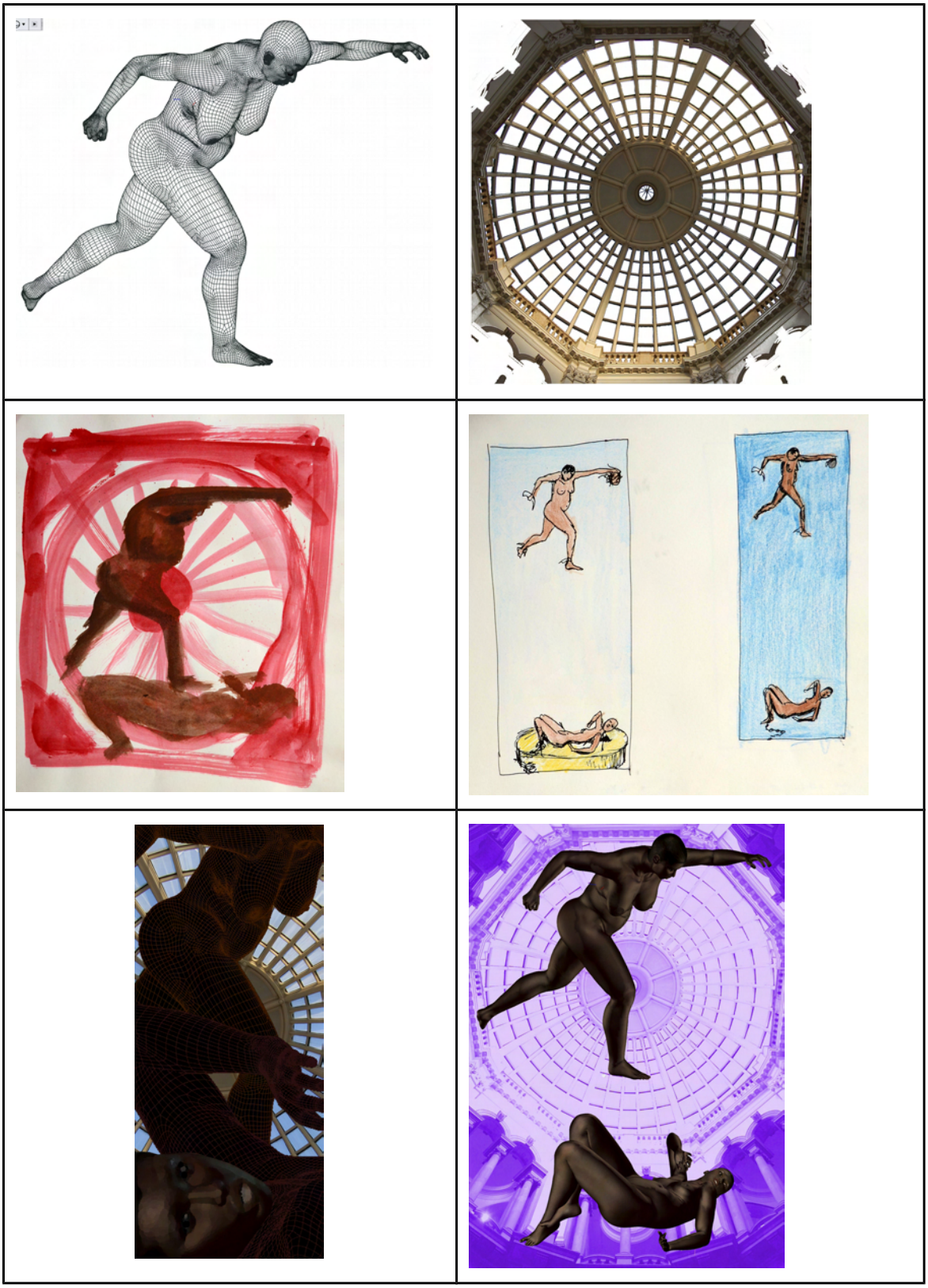

Fig. 6.11: Donkor. K., Table containing six Andromeda and Nanny Studies. All 2011, clockwise: Photomontage, pen and pastel on paper; digital montage; digital montage; acrylic on paper; digital 3D

My first digital composition (see Fig. 6.10) had been intended as the basis for the start of an oil painting, a way of experimenting with the observed forms appropriated from Henry Fehr's sculpture. However, the evident desparation in the Nanny and Cetus figures and the horror of the severed head seemed to me, not so much a critique of the fugitive Africana in British Andromeda artworks, but, instead, a restatement of the original myth's basic narrative problematics.

In the first instance, Andromeda, the female figure whose black identity had been 'suppressed' (McGrath, 1993) by so many generations of white male artists unwilling to visualise a black woman as the mythological paragon of beauty—seemed almost as 'fugitive' in my image as she was in so many other paintings. Despite the racial dynamics, I regarded the subjective agency of artistic Andromedas as made 'fugitive' through the process of being disrobed under the patriarchal gaze of artists. Simply clothing her in my scene, but then suggesting an immanent trauma from which, she needed rescue, seemed to be too complacent: because it seemed only to reinscribe Andromeda's visual-art status as a perennial, passive, female victim.

In order to try and resolve and remove my figure's primary status as victim, I conducted a series of visual experiments with variations of just the two female figures—and with the Cetus figure removed entirely from the scene (see fig. 6.11, above). However, without a third figure my scene seemed too distant from Fehr's sculpture, making the possibility of viewers being able to refer to it less viable. Therefore, as well as removing the Cetus figure, I also restored the nakedness of Fehr's iconography, hoping that this would draw my image closer to the appearance of the sculpture (see fig. 6.11, above). To assist in this process of returning to Fehr's source imagery, I also introduced a new element: a representation of the Millbank building's Roman-inspired dome, from under which Fehr's sculpture had been expelled to the outside of the gallery (see fig. 6.11, above).

My dome image was acquired by remaining in the gallery one evening after working there as a project artist. Lying on the floor beneath the dome I photographed it and the classical columns supporting it. I then incorporated my image into photo-editing software and rendered the sky transparent, enabling the architectural structure of the dome to function as tracery, a web-like layer through which, other realities might appear and disappear. The circular, webbed tracery was then layered into imagery with my two female protagonists. However, despite my creation of dozens of variations along those lines, I felt that the sensuous, vulnerable contrapposto of Andromeda in relation to the domineering stance of Nanny had created a dynamic between the two figures that was difficult to associate with any form of rescue. Instead, a new, violent, eroticism emerged between the two female figures.

Of course, the fact that this domineering relationship had resided implicitly in Fehr's sculpture was clear, and had been hinted at by Marion Spielmann's complaint about the 'superposition' of Perseus (Spielmann, 1901; 38). I thought, at one stage, that, to bring this dynamic to the fore in my own work would have been a method to make even more explicit the story's archaic brutalism. Instead, my compositional manipulations seemed to have made my own work complicit in the brutality of the drama itself, as was perhaps inevitable from the beginning.

As an artist whose goal was to introduce criticality into the tradition of Andromeda, it was a brutality that I did not want celebrate. I thought that my new images were not unmasking Andromeda as a self-possessed African princess, but as an ever more victimized figure. This line of enquiry led me to become interested, not in depicting Andromeda as a victim to be rescued by Nanny, or by anybody else, but in removing the rescuer figure from the scene entirely. I began to consider that perhaps my artistic intention was to take Perseus's place, and to rescue Andromeda from *him*—and from his many historical mythologers.

6.7 Third Andromeda project: painting 'The rescue of Andromeda'

Fig. 6.12: Donkor, K., 'The Rescue of Andromeda'. 2011, oil on canvas, 120cm x 90cm.

I decided that the Nanny figure of a matriarchal, Africana rescuer was not compatible with a fuller critique of the Andromeda motif. My first digital image (fig. 6.10) had reinscribed the Ethiopian princess in the guise of victimhood, passive on her sacrificial bed/rock, in anticipation of a horrible fate, whilst the action of liberation, death and conflict swirled

around her. My second series of images had removed the 'persecutor' figure of dragon/rapist in an attempt to free Andromeda from her cycle of victimhood (Fig. 6.11). However, by my retention of Fehr's fearful pose, she appeared to be persecuted again by a Nanny figure that used Fehr's triumphalist gestures. If abstracted from her dramatic triangle, Fehr's cowering damsel seemed to be, as Fanon had put it, 'steeped in the inessentiality of servitude… [and] did not fight for [her] freedom' (Fanon, 2008; 219). Of course, as a stereotype about the 'Negro', Fanon knew that such a caricature was not true of the targets of racism, anymore than it was for the targets of patriarchy. After all, the inessential 'victim' for whom Fanon had expressed his disdain (the 'Negro'), he had also claimed 'is not'—that is to say, for Fanon the 'inessential' victim was a fictive construct (Fanon, 2008; 231). In like manner, I thought Fehr's cowering Andromeda could not exist alongside my Nanny. If my unmasking of Africana was to have a more profound critical value, I would have to find a new way to incorporate Fehr's Andromeda at the centre of my work.

Experimenting with the x-y-z axes of my 3D Andromeda figure, I realised that, if rotated through the horizontal axis by 90 degrees so that the figure's torso was upright, it was possible to retain some of Fehr's posture such as the protectively crossed ankles and contrapposto shoulders, whilst just a slight contraction of the hip joint would approximate a sitting position. Seeing this new, upright Andromeda based on Fehr's pose suggested a possibility. Perhaps, instead of the clothed but prone figure and the disrobed 'damsel in distress', I should produce an Andromeda that was seated and beyond the victimising frame? Such a strategy might produce an unmasking artwork that was a more convincing critique of the traditional Andromedan dramatic triangle.

Having freed my image from such a close dependence on Fehr's, I continued along a completely new line of research. Why not remove Andromeda from the digital 3D domain that seemed to be constraining my imagination? To help me in the next phase of my investigation, I asked my then partner (now wife), Risikat Donkor, a British woman of Nigerian heritage, to sit for a portrait that I hoped would reimagine the ancient tale. This would enable a new experiment: to project a contemporary historic subject's Africana heritage into the mythical domain of Andromeda, rather than trying to pull Fehr's sculpted posture into the realm of Africana. Just as the Ethiopian Andromeda voyaged with Perseus to reign over Mycenae, perhaps the most important element of this new détourned or unmasked image would be its portrayal of a contemporary African-European woman by a painter who was permitted by her to give full reign to her embodied subjectivity: so that she was rendered in sympathetic rather than objectifying detail? It would be a figure that was neither disrobed nor chained, nor even menaced by otherness.

Fig. 6.13: Donkor, K., 'The Rescue of Andromeda' (detail). 2011, oil on canvas.

The sitting for the portrait was timed for dusk, with a strong reflection emanating from a light source above and behind the sitter. My composition would thereby be seen as either pre-dawn or after-dusk, a time of day which pointed towards the always-transitional nature of the mythology. The position of the light and its sharp shadows suggested a light source of about 45 degrees. The canvas was prepared using thick acrylic gesso finely sanded down to a smooth surface, through which only a faint trace of the texture remained. This absorbent ground allowed for a highly detailed, very thin oil grisaille, and prevented the dark surface of the painting becoming overly affected by variations in the canvas texture. I hoped that the interplay of an even light through subsequent glazes would enable the establishment of those concise subtleties of colour that are necessary to evoke twilight effectively.

My sitter had an upright posture with one ankle crossed in front of the other and a slight contrapposto—both of which relaxed the strenuous contortions imposed by Fehr on his model. Risikat's posture unmasked a self-possessed woman, resistant to the objectifying gaze of post-Renaissance mythographers, with their demand for nakedness, victimhood and the erasure of black identities. As a consequence, my iconographical process retained a consistency with other paintings in the *Queens of the Undead* cycle that also situated portraits of contemporary, African-British women in narrative scenes drawn from historical Africana texts and imagery, but which also resisted infusing them with either defeat or nostalgia.

Recalling that Perseus's mythical journey had began in what is today Morocco, I made, in 2011, my own pilgrimage to the Atlas mountains, and returned with a series of photographic studies which, because of their indexical links to the narrative of Ovid's epic, symbolically imparted to my new work a sense of geospatial contact, bearing witness to the now unmasked Africana journeys of Perseus and Andromeda, as well as to those of a 21st-century painter and sitter.

If a viewer of my new work conceived of the figure as an unmasked Africana-Andromeda, situated within an Ovidian narrative, could she also be imagined as the enthroned Queen of Mycenae? In the middle distance behind her, the sculpture of a Victorian/ancient woman's torment and of a bestial hunger too, spread its wings into the night sky. Cetus has been restored to his place on Fehr's structure and he had lost the human form I had given him in my earlier composition. In order to achieve the right perspective for the low horizon, I had recreated Fehr's entire sculpture in digital 3D, and then painted from its rendered image: viewers would be able to see dimly the bronze hand of Fehr's Andromeda endlessly grasping for help. Even so, I had not permitted any Romantic superman/woman to descend from heaven in order to fulfil the desire to consume a spectacle of victimhood.

Only my representation of a faint jet stream acted as a reminder that when this painting was underway a new generation of missile-firing Perseus's were again supposedly rescuing Africans from 'monsters' in Libya[37]. But, in the centre of a cloudless sky and appearing just above the queen's head, I also painted the galaxy that was named after her as it makes its nightly orbit. The dias of Fehr's sculpture was symbolically returned to the realm of the dome at Millbank, which I had digitally flattened into an enormous circular grid and had then rendered through paint as a self-classifying, ordered table of pale, stone ribs gleaming under moonlight.

6.8 Summary of my Rescue Of Andromeda research process

Starting from the critical reading of the Black Andromeda in McGrath and other authors, I followed the methodology set out in Chapter Two. Not taking anything for granted, I considered the various Andromeda works in Tate's collection and then selected the most physically accessible work (although not necessarily the most obvious) to proceed with. I visited Henry Fehr's *The rescue of Andromeda,* and observed it closely through both drawing and photography, 'visually thinking through' its form and iconology. Appropriating these documentary resemblances of the sculpture, I then began to analyse them for ways in which they could be synthesized—initially creating a series of digital, three-dimensional models of the masking artwork.

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37. I am here referring to the use of airpower by Britain and France in 2011 to attack the armed forces of the Libyan government, which they accused of intending to commit genocide in the Libyan city of Benghazi.

I unmasked the fugitive Africana implicit in Fehr's sculpture by digitally incorporating his sculptural forms into a tableau that I had imagined as a Black Atlantic rescue. My new scene derived its narrative force from the history of Nanny of the Maroons, the heroine of 18th-century Jamaica, but it was translated into contemporary costume, with the 'monster' faced by the Andromeda figure symbolized by a white man in a business suit. I was not initially satisfied with this tableau and began to experiment with a more abstracted series of unmasking compositions that were visually closer to the nakedness of Fehr's sculpture. After many dozens of these experiments, I decided that the entire 'rescue' scene required a completely new investigative track.

My principal Andromeda figure was (perhaps) no longer embroiled in scenes of melodramatic rescue and heroism: instead there was a poised and contemplative portrait. The subject was a woman of self-acknowledged African and European heritage (no doubt like all of Europe's women in that regard—whether they choose to acknowledge it or not) who had agreed to participate in my research, allowing me to make an 'unmasked Africana' work of portraiture and history painting which has—perhaps for the first time in 300 years—overturned the racialized erasure from fine art of one of the ancient world's most enduring and complex mythical figures: Andromeda, Princess of Ethiopia, Queen of Mycenae.

In conclusion, I thought that my investigation had revealed that the process of unmasking fugitive Africana in Tate's British art collection was a methodology that could facilitate a deeply critical practice that produced new forms of knowledge and understanding through my studio-based practice.

CHAPTER 7: MAKING 'YAA ASANTEWAA INSPECTING THE DISPOSITIONS AT EJISU'

Introduction

This chapter documents my research into, about and for, the creation of an oil painting entitled *Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu* (Donkor, 2012: see Fig. 7.1, below). I explore how I tried to make an artwork that critically unmasked what I considered to be fugitive Africana, and which was embodied by a portrait painting in Tate's collection of British Art entitled *Study of Mme Gautreau*[38] (1884) by John Singer Sargent R.A. (1856–1925).

This element of my thesis marked a shift in emphasis from the concerns which were central to the iconology of Andromeda. Instead of the focus on an entirely mythic narrative, I considered the artistic and art historical production of the biography of Sargent's sitter Mme Gautreau (1859–1915). Whilst, with Andromeda, the key masking artwork by Henry Fehr had generated relatively little interest, Sargent's artwork had, by contrast, received much critical and scholarly attention, thereby altering the nature of 'visibility' in relation to the masking process and, by extension, my critical reading and appropriation of it.

38. *To make reading long sentences slightly easier, and to avoid too much repetition, I sometimes refer to Sargent's 'Study of Mme Gautreau' simply as his 'Study', likewise I sometimes refer to his 'Portrait of Madame X' simply as his 'Madame X'. When referring to both of them, I call them his 'Gautreau paintings' or 'Gautreau portraits'.*

7.1 My artistic intentions in picturing Yaa Asantewaa

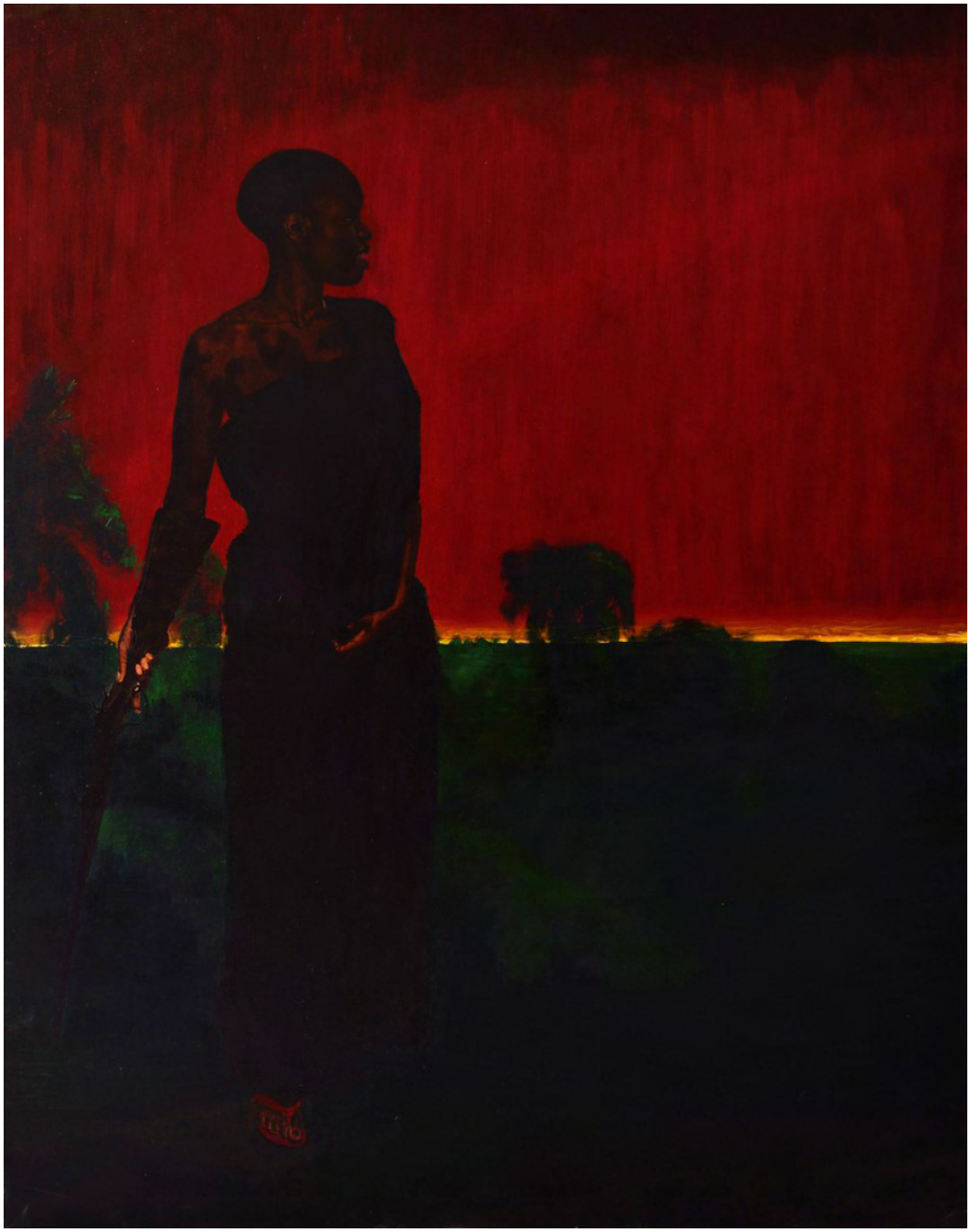

Fig. 7.1: Donkor, K., 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu'. 2012, oil paints on canvas, 210 cm × 165 cm

The oil painting reproduced in Fig. 7.1, which I created in the summer of 2012, was titled *Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu*. At more than 2 metres in height, it was one of my largest paintings and its imposing scale was intended to establish a sense of monumentality that I believed helped to reimagine the iconography of a historically significant woman called Yaa Asantewaa (c. 1830/40–1921) (Boahen, 2003; 115). She was commander-in-chief of a conflict, sometimes referred to as the 'War of the Golden Stool', which was a war of resistance fought from March 1900 to March 1901 against British occupation in the West African

kingdom of Ashanti (now part of the Republic of Ghana). The word 'dispositions' in my title referred to the battlefield term that denoted the position and strength of armed forces. Viewers were invited to consider the painting as a scene where Yaa Asantewaa was reimagined as though surveying the Ashanti armed forces. My motive was to develop the long-term cycle of works called *Queens of the Undead* which, as I mentioned in Chapter Four, attempted to celebrate, but also critically complicate the agency of historic African and Diaspora female, military leaders. One key methodology in my *Queens of the Undead* paintings was to appropriate motifs from each woman's European artistic contemporaries, thereby indicating her temporal proximity to, and her aestheticized distance from, elements of the hegemonic, western canon. This method of using artistic motifs that recalled the parallel unfolding of European art and European colonialism might intriguingly have been likened to the series *Notes from Elmina* by the American artist Radcliffe Bailey who, in 2011, had created artworks about the history of slave trading in Ghana, painted on contemporaneous European sheet music (Thompson, 2011) (although, I was unaware of this until years later). And, because Yaa Asantewaa had been described as the 'Joan of Arc' of her people, (Boahen, 2003; 115)—I, as a British-born person of Ghanaian family heritage, was motivated to learn about, and contribute to, the cultural imagination and discourse that addressed this intriguing, historical character.

However, my decision to centre the legend of Yaa Asantewaa as primary in the title of the painting as well as in its iconography complicated a secondary function—which was my attempt to apply the 'unmasking Africana' methodology. The assignment of the unmasking function to a secondary role corresponded to one of the principles that I outlined in my research methodology, namely: that the critical unmasking of fugitive Africana did not necessarily have to be the *primary* mode of existence of a new work. In this instance, the secondary, unmasking function—about Sargent's *Study of Mme Gautreau*—was embedded in a painting that was intended primarily to evoke Yaa Asantewaa.

Fig. 7.2: Left: Donkor, K., 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu'. 2012; Right: Sargent, J.S., Study of Mme Gautreau, 1884, oil on canvas, 206 x 108cm

I hoped that the methodology I used to paint the Yaa Asantewaa figure would give my work its role as unmasking fugitive Africana. The Tate-owned painting *Study of Mme Gautreau* was made in 1884 by the American painter John Singer Sargent (1856–1925). An illustration of Sargent's painting can be seen side-by-side with my own in Fig. 7.2 (above). I had intended that the unmasking function in my own painting was facilitated by constructing specific, visual resemblances between it and Sargent's work—resemblances which conformed to my axiom that a new, unmasking artwork must produce a critical appropriation of, and a synthesis from, recognisable elements in an existing, canonical work. Specifically, I intended that the visual similarities would be generated by resemblances to the posture and costume represented in Sargent's work, as well as to the overall composition. In this chapter, I discuss the visual resemblances between the two paintings—that is to say, I analyse how elements of Sargent's work were appropriated and remade, or 'synthesized' into my painting.

My intention was that even in the absence of the present text, viewers who recognised resemblances and distinctions between the two paintings would be empowered to ask whether or not those similarities and distinctions were the result of randomized acts of appropriation. I hoped viewers might be encouraged to query the biographical relationship between the two figures, Yaa Asantewaa and Mme Gautreau. However, on reflection, I wondered whether that

was expecting too much of this particular work: and, whether my '*Yaa Asantewaa* …' was only a *partially* successful attempt to critically unmask fugitive Africana—a project that might be served better by further works based on the discoveries facilitated whilst producing my painting? As a consequence of my reflexive conclusion that I could improve the signifying effectiveness of the painting, I decided to produce a second version using the same title, materials and dimensions, but with an altered iconography. The second version of *Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu* (2014) is illustrated in fig. 7.3.

Fig. 7.3: Donkor, K., 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu'. 2014, oil paints on canvas, 210 x 165cm

The reference in both titles to 'dispositions' of military forces was intended to produce a sense of narrative tension, because the paintings did not show any visible 'dispositions' either for Yaa Asantewaa or for the viewer to 'inspect'. My lone figure was painted open-mouthed (unlike in Sargent's work) as though uttering words to soldiers—with her military role emphasised by the shotgun in her right hand (which, in Sargent's work, rested on a table). Therefore, my figure's 'speaking' expression, her steady horizontal gaze, and the title were intended to suggest that her 'listeners' were visible to her—if not to the painting's viewer.

My titles also located the imagined landscape by naming a real, historical site: 'Ejisu', which was Yaa Asantewaa's home region in Ashanti—(and which, was alternatively spelled as 'Edweso': Boahen, 2003). In addition to my figure's expression of utterance and her possession of a gun, there were a number of symbolic, iconic and indexical meanings available in the image, which, as well as posture and costume, also included the land and skyscape, and which I shall analyse later. In ways that were perhaps similar to interpretations of Sargent's painting, I intended my work to suggest concerns: about looking and being looked at; about identity—who is addressing whom, and in what capacity. In Chapter Eight, I shall return to my specific interpretations of Sargent's process and motivations in more detail, but at this juncture I shall continue by documenting the general iconography of my own painting.

7.2 Visual sources for 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu'

Fig. 7.4 (below) is a chart that I created after making the first painting, in order to visually display the iconographic source material for my motifs. Its purpose was to set out in a numbered and labelled visual format the interweaving of appropriations and original painting that were synthesized into my composition and contributed to producing intended meanings.

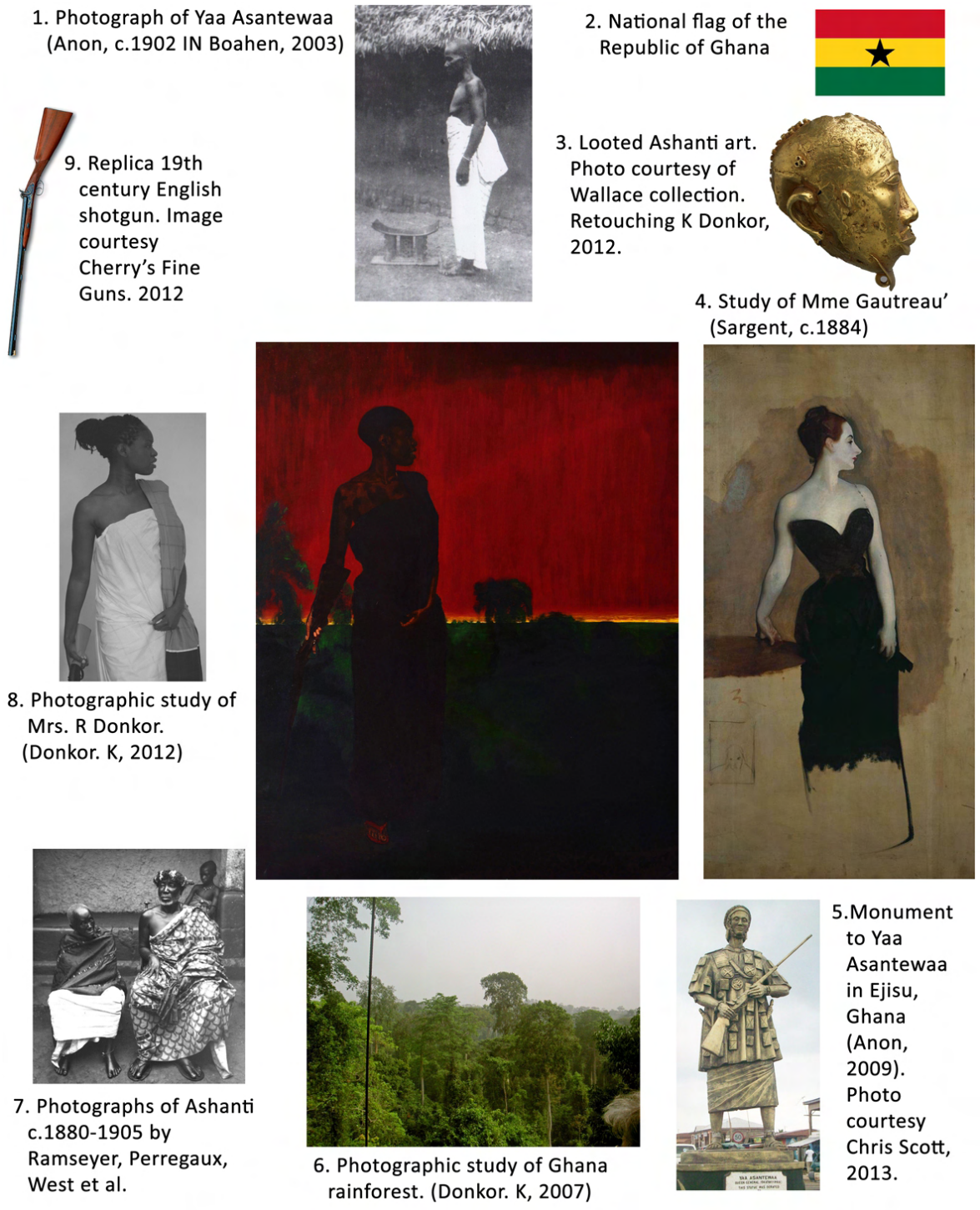

Fig. 7.4:. Iconographic grid of visual source material for 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu'. The chart includes individual image credits.

In the centre of the chart is my painting, and around it, numbered from one to nine, are representations of the motifs and references used. What follows is a brief guide to the chart.

The first element (1) was a photograph of Yaa Asantewaa, probably from 1901–2 that appeared in the only scholarly, biographical book devoted to her life—*Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900–1* (2003)—which was written by the Ghanaian historian Albert Adu Boahen (1932–2006). I used the image to inform me about hairstyle, likeness and costume—

and it enabled me to articulate historical fidelity by painting my figure wearing an Ashanti toga, as well as having a richly pigmented complexion and close cropped hair. (See below, Fig. 7.5)

Fig. 7.5: Left: Donkor, K. 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu', (detail), 2012. Right: Anon. Photograph said to be of Yaa Asantewaa (detail) (c.1901–21 IN Boahen, 2003).

As I indicted earlier, all the paintings in my *Queens of the Undead* series had appropriated elements from artworks by European artistic contemporaries of the female subjects in my paintings. In order to be consistent with that method, element number five (5) was Sargent's 1884 *Study of Mme Gautreau*, and from it I drew the basic posture of my Yaa Asantewaa figure. This meant that in Sargent's painting and in my own, the figure was painted as though seen from a distance of about 4–10 metres, with the viewer also standing (this I deduced from the angle of view for Sargent's tabletop). In both, the head was in sharp profile; her gaze directed in a horizontal line to her left; with the line between her chin and hyoid bone horizontal. Both figures stood with their shoulders presented as though parallel to the plane of the image surface and with the right shoulder slightly lowered (see Fig 7.6, below).

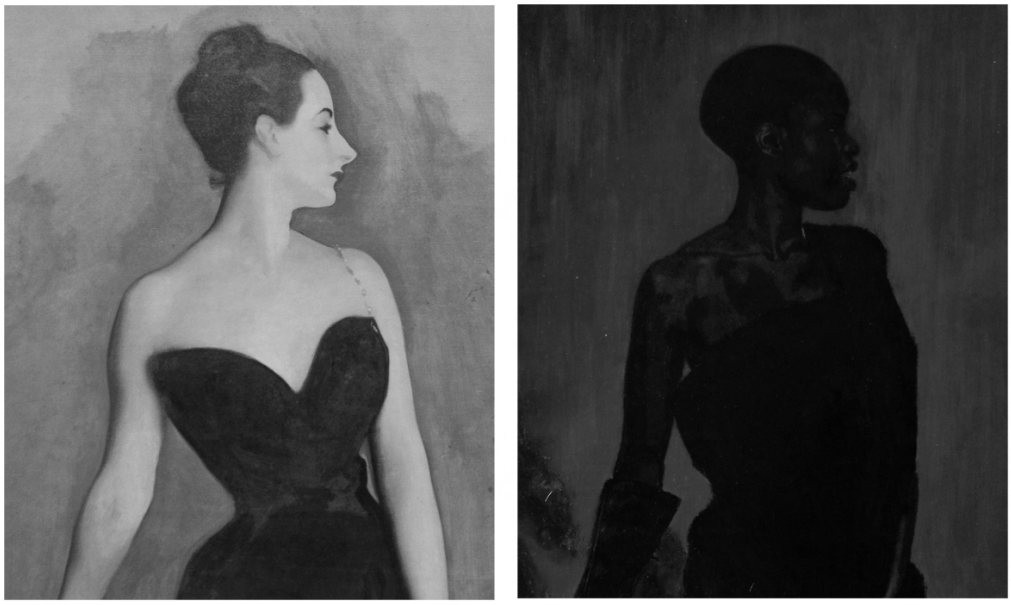

Fig. 7.6: Left: Sargent, J., 'Study of Mme Gautreau' (detail), 1884. Right: Donkor, K., 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the disposition at Ejisu' (detail), 2012.

In both, her straight-backed torso leant slightly to her right and receded slightly into the picture space. The right arms extended down and slightly away from both torsi; with elbows rotated so the olecranon (elbow tip) pointed towards and behind the torsi. *Mme Gautreau*'s right wrist was slightly flexed, but it was not in my image. Both right palms faced towards the viewer. However, whilst *Mme Gautreau*'s index finger was extended, allowing the first joint to rest on the surface of a table and support the weight of her arm, *Yaa Asantewaa*'s index finger was extended behind her trigger and her other fingers supported the weight of her shotgun (see Fig 7.6a, below).

Fig. 7.6a: Left: Sargent, J.S., 'Study of Mme Gautreau' (detail), 1884. Right: Donkor, K., 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu' (detail) 2012.

Sargent's composition also guided the placing of my figure in relation to the upper, lower and left edges of the frame (see Fig. 7.2, above). Element eight (8) was a studio photograph that I made of my portrait model, Risikat Donkor, in a pose similar to that of Sargent's *Study of Mme Gautreau*, but dressed as though wearing a late-19th-century Ashanti toga—and holding a toy shotgun. This photographic study helped inform me how to paint from life similar shoulder, neck, arm and hand postures to those represented in Sargent's *Study of Mme Gautreau* —whilst simultaneously paying attention to the individual portrait of my model, and to the simulated dress of an Ashanti noblewoman. Therefore, elements one, five and eight—the Yaa Asantewaa photograph, the Sargent painting and my studio photograph—were represented, through my painting, in a new, reimagined figure that appropriated and synthesized visual elements from all three pictorial sources.

In addition, the Yaa Asantewaa figure was also informed by my visual studies of Element (7), which, in the chart, represented photography in Ashanti by 19th and early 20th-century missionaries, such as the Swiss Fritz Ramseyer (1840–1914) (Jenkins, 2005; 106) and his colleague Edmond Perregaux. Collectively, the works of these photographers, available from the Basel Mission archives (Basel, 1860), enabled me to calibrate my painting in relation to photographed costumes, hairstyles and ornaments of Ashanti women in the late 19th century. Element four (4) was a retouched image of a gold sculpture that had been stolen from the Ashanti royal palace by British Army looters in 1874, and which is now in the Wallace Collection, London (Greefield, 1996; 119). This sculpture informed me that my use of naturalistic portraiture for Yaa Asantewaa was historically congruent with the naturalistic strand of Ashanti art, and therefore did not represent an incongruous 'European' tradition, as was wrongly implied by European Primitivists in the early 20th Century such as Roger Fry (1866–1934) (See Fry, 1920, 68), who were unaware of (or else chose to ignore) West African naturalism.

Element number two (2) in the chart was the national flag of the Republic of Ghana which, after a peaceful campaign led by the Pan-Africanist intellectual, Kwame Nkrumah, won its independence from Britain in 1957. I used Theodosia Okoh's 1957 design for the Ghanaian national flag to establish the red, gold, green and black colour scheme of the land, costume and skyscape in the painting, thereby associating the artwork symbolically with the national narrative of Ghana's people. This flag motif was synthesized with element six (6), which was my own 2007 photographic study of a Ghanaian forest (See Appendix 3, A3.19), and which helped me to represent the terrain where the British and Ashanti armies conducted their field manoeuvres (Edgerton, 1997; Boahen, 2003) (see Fig 7.8, below).


Fig. 7.8:. Left: Donkor, K., 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu' (detail), 2012; Right: Okoh, T., Design of the National flag of the Republic of Ghana, 1957.

The fifth element (5) in the chart was a photograph of the monument located in Yaa Asantewaa's hometown of Ejisu. From this (together with the image which the monument copied), I was informed that popular iconography consistently depicted Yaa Asantewaa as an armed figure (see Fig. 7.13, below). The monument helped inform me about the ninth element (9) on the chart: a recent photograph of a replica 19th-century English shotgun (West Africa being a primary market for European small-arms manufacturers) (Edgerton, 1997). This image informed me how to paint accurately a 19th-century firearm, through which my work could be understood as being consistent with the military iconographic tradition that was associated with Yaa Asantewaa.

7.3 Iconological, narrative information about Yaa Asantewaa

In order to make my painting, I took, amongst my principal starting points, historical narratives of Nana Yaa Asantewaa's life and times. I used these narratives to help establish which motifs would constitute my overall composition. Because she was represented in many contemporaneous documents, Yaa Asantewaa was a well-attested, and well-documented, historical figure (Edgerton, 1995; Boahen, 2003; McCaskie, 2007). There were also a few photographs of semi-reliable provenance. However, although her name and legend had a popular dispersal, particularly in Ghana and amongst the African Diaspora, there had been only one book-length, historical study of her life. In addition, the few historically attested photographs of Yaa Asantewaa seemed very little known—with internet searches yielding few results. Instead, there were a number of imaginary compositions in circulation, which purported to be of or about her—as well as one, widely used but unattested photographic image, which I suspected was apocryphal not historical.

In consequence of these observations, my principal historical source for creating the iconography of *Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu* was drawn from Boahen's book (2003), which explained how his subject came to have such an unusual position for a woman

in the Ashanti military hierarchy, and which also addressed deficiencies in her historiography:

> *A complete, detailed history of Yaa Asantewaa and the Yaa Asantewaa War is yet to be told and this is what is attempted in this study. (Boahen, 2003; 19)*

In terms of his book's usefulness as narrative and visual reference material for my own painting, Boahen's outstanding academic career as a historian, alongside that of his editor the Ghana-born Harvard historian Emmanuel Akeampong, lent his work credibility as a reliable interpretation of the available documentation. I thought too that such academic credibility extended to the photographs Boahen included in his book. Boahen's archival references included primary, military and diplomatic accounts of Yaa Asantewaa alongside oral testimony from survivors and their descendants. My belief in Boahen's credibility helped me to think of my painting as a form of visual interpretation, even though I did not try to reconstruct a specific, historically documented moment. Instead, my work was intended to act as an imaginative elaboration of the legend of Yaa Asantewaa informed by the historically constructed past.

In addition to Boahen, I also consulted other historical resources including: the 1995 book by the American anthropologist Robert Edgerton, *The Fall of the Asante Empire: The Hundred-Year War for Africa's Gold Coast*; and a 2007 essay by the British professor of African History Tom McCaskie, *The Life and Afterlife of Yaa Asantewaa*. McCaskie's work was a commentary about how Yaa Asantewaa's legend continued to excite controversy in Ghana and also, amongst global African diasporas. McCaskie's survey of the Diaspora 'afterlife' of Yaa Asantewaa was particularly interesting because I had first become aware of her during the 1980s, as a result of attending the 'Black History for Action' seminars held at St Matthews church in Brixton, South London. In the same period, I also attended African Diaspora cultural events at Westminster's 'Yaa Asantewaa Arts Centre', which had been renamed from 'The Factory' in 1986 (Yaa, 2013). Since the 1980s, its publicity material had kept alive the memory of the organisation's namesake—so, the Yaa Asantewaa Arts Centre was typical of Diaspora, cultural discourse identified by McCaskie. The name of the centre functioned as a disruptive element in London's ideological cityscape because, until the cultural assertiveness of the postcolonial Diasporas, London had produced only a monolithic celebration of imperialist icons articulated through statues, street names and other urban paraphernalia. I hoped my painting, would contribute to this Diaspora disruption of the hegemonic, cultural landscape of the British artworld, which, I thought, was situated in complacently close proximity to its imperialist genealogies.

When I undertook my first painting, I consulted the historical narratives cited above as

foundational elements of my research process. They helped reinforce my understanding that the matrilineal, Ashanti Kingdom into which the noblewoman Nana Yaa Asantewaa was born had eventually become a constituent, 'traditional' element of the Republic of Ghana in West Africa. However, throughout the 19th century Ashanti was an expansive, independent state, which fought the British Empire in five military conflicts—the last one occurring from March 1900 through to March 1901, and making it one of the first wars of the 20th century. Although Ashanti won the first two conflicts, it suffered increasingly significant losses, so that in the fourth Anglo-Ashanti war of 1896 (Edgerton, 1995), its capital, Kumasi, was looted and razed to the ground for the second time in 25 years by British forces—and a permanent occupation was imposed. The Ashanti King Prempeh, along with much of his court was exiled, firstly to Sierra Leone, and then to a site in the Seychelles Islands, 7500 miles from their homeland.

The occupation and royal exile were opposed by many Ashanti, and when hostilities broke out again in 1900, leadership of the resistance was assumed by Yaa Asantewaa—although she did not seek the monarchy of Ashanti in her own right. After a year of fighting, Asantewaa's forces were defeated and, upon her capture, she was also incarcerated on the Indian Ocean prison camp along with many of her General Staff. Wary of reigniting Ashanti patriotic sentiment, the British did not execute Yaa Asantewaa (although other resistance leaders were executed), but they did consider her so dangerous that she was never allowed to see her homeland again—in consequence of which she died a prisoner after 20 years (Boahen, 2003).

7.4 Iconography of Yaa Asantewaa: Photographs of a Queen Mother

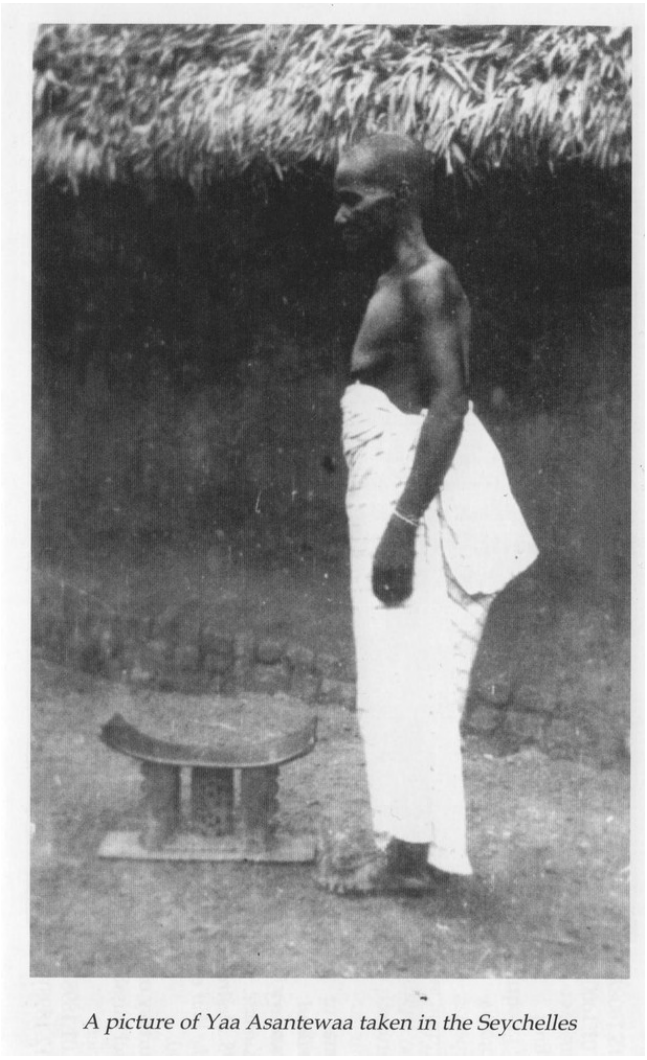

Fig. 7.9: Anon. Nana Yaa Asantewaa PoW. c.1901–21. (IN Boahen, 2003; 97*).*

As I mentioned earlier, the photograph illustrated in fig 7.9 appeared in Boahen's book about Yaa Asantewaa, where it was the first of the illustrations located in the centre of his volume. I now want to address in more detail the provenance and possible meanings of this image, in order to analyse more clearly what role it played in the creation of my painting.

Boahen's caption informed me that it was 'a picture of Yaa Asantewaa taken in the Seychelles' (2003; 97) and I was also aware that the front cover design featured a cropped and tinted enlargement of the face, (although, unfortunately, poor cropping seemed to have mutilated the nose). Although the book design was by Anne Y. Sakyi (of Sub-Saharan Publishers), the credits in the frontispiece for the 'Cover picture' were given to the 'Basel Mission Archives, Switzerland'. The plates within the book (including the pictures of Yaa Asantewaa) were also credited to the Basel Mission, which was a still-existing missionary organisation that had a prominent (and violently controversial) presence in Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti, at the time of the wars of 1896 and 1900.

Delving further into their archive, much of which was online, I discovered that they possessed a wide array of late 19th and early 20th century photographs from Africa and around the world, including a few images of the Ashanti exile community in the Seychelles. Yet, I was still curious about the circumstances in which this particular image was made. Part of the answer lay further on in Boahen's book, which, at the end of his plates, also included a group photograph (Fig. 7.10, below). In his text, Boahen considered Yaa Asantewaa's appearance and referred to:

> *…the photograph taken of her at the time of her arrest in 1901, as well as a group photograph on the Seychelles Islands, seen by the writer during his visit (Yaa Asantewaa was seated in the front row holding a fan and looked in her eighties or nineties)… (Boahen, 2003; 116)*

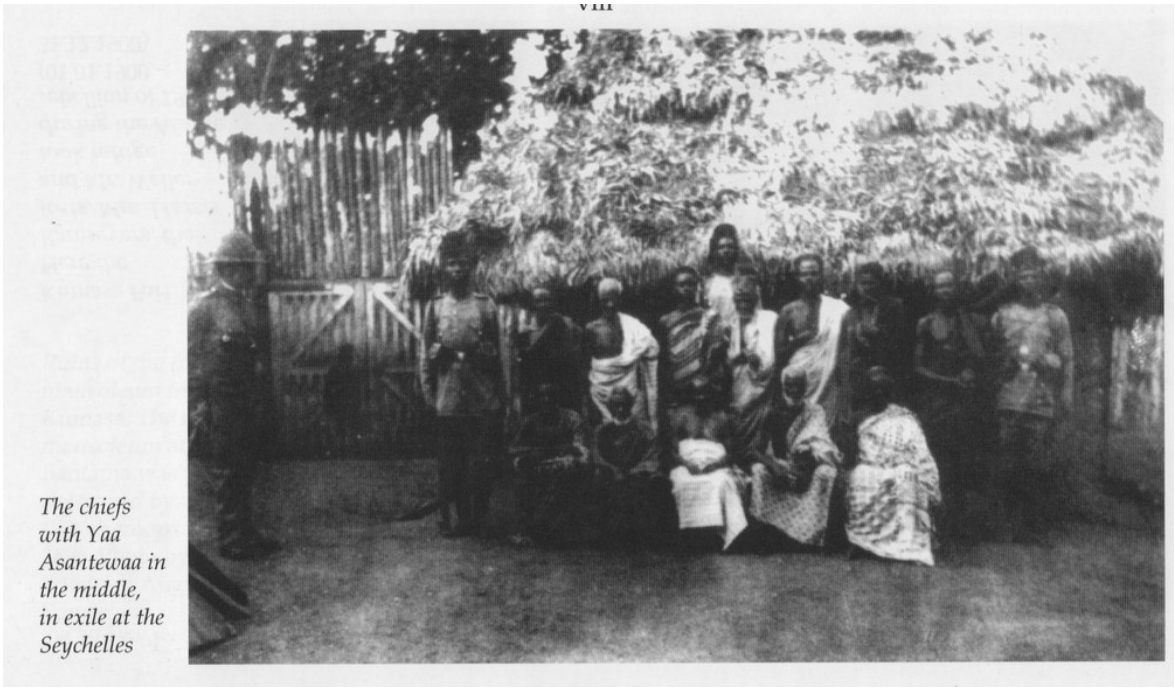

Fig. 7.10: Anon. Nana Yaa Asantewaa and fellow PoWs. c. 1901–21 (IN Boahen, 2003)

Although he did not seem to include a 'photograph taken at the time of her arrest' I assumed that the photograph in Fig. 7.10 (above) was the group photograph referred to, as it illustrated some of the conditions of the prison camp. To the far left was, presumably, a British officer glaring menacingly at the other figures: to either side of the main group were armed guards and, in the centre of the seated figures—all leaders of the resistance—sat a bareheaded, bare breasted, elderly woman, who I took to be Yaa Asantewaa in her robe. The presence of uniformed, armed guards and the high stockade in the background indicated a potent sign that Yaa Asantewaa and her compatriots were to be represented, through the photograph, as dangerous to British imperial interests, even when they were 7,500 miles away from Ashanti.

In making my own, limited assessment of the provenance of the images, I noted that in both pictures the figure named as Yaa Asantewaa was wearing a pale, striped toga, possibly

produced in the distinctive, Ashanti textiles industry. This, along with the caption, suggested that the two photographs were produced on the same occasion. Another element, which helped me to assess the value of the photographs, was the fact that some of the historiography referred to the Yaa Asantewaa War as the 'War of the Golden Stool' (Heron, 2007; 187). This was because, one of its immediate causes was that the British Governor of the neighbouring Gold Coast colony, Sir Frederick Hodgson, verbally desecrated the most sacred symbol of Ashanti religious belief, the so-called Golden Stool—which was said by the Ashanti to represent a 17th-century royal miracle (Boahen, 2003; 41).

The first of Boahen's photographs (Fig. 7.9, above), in which an elderly black woman wearing a toga faced a carved, Ashanti-type seat, suggested that the photographer intended to illustrate a protagonist whilst she performatively contemplated a cause of the war (although, the British never captured the Golden Stool, so the item in the photograph was a prop). When paired with the same figure's appearance in the group photograph of elderly people dressed as Ashanti nobility, under armed guard in a tropical prison camp, I understood why—coupled with the photographs' seeming antiquity—Boahen had identified the subjects as exiles.

However, there still remained uncertainties about the photographs' precise provenance and nature, which made me cautious about how I would utilise them as historical source materials in my painting. Firstly, other photographs in the book, which appeared to be of late 19th-century and early 1900s Ghana, were all dated, with the photographer sometimes named, whereas the two of Yaa Asantewaa were undated, with no author given. Also, there were no Yaa Asantewaa images in the online Basel Mission Archive, even though Boahen indicated that they were the source of his images (I enquired if the Mission had any offline images, but they did not reply). Another area of uncertainty was that Boahen mentioned an 'open fan' in Yaa Asantewaa's hand, which I think was a misidentification of her toga in the group photo (Boahen, 2003; 116).

Finally, I needed to consider the existence of a third photograph that did not appear in Boahen's book, but which was displayed at the Kumasi Fort and Military Museum in Ghana. In that print, which was clearly part of the same series, a woman identified as Yaa Asantewaa was pictured standing bare-breasted next to the carved stool, but facing the camera and looking frail and forlorn (Accra, undated). The museum was a former British army barracks, and the architecture writer Janet Hess reported museum guides telling visitors that Yaa Asantewaa was held prisoner there after her capture in 1901 (Hess, 2003; 37). Neither Hess, nor the museum display gave any clues as to how the photograph came into their possession, or under what circumstances it was taken—and my emailed enquiry also met with no response.

Fig. 7.11: Anon. Photograph of the Yaa Asantewaa museum display at the Kumasi Fort and Military Museum, Ghana. (undated) Photograph courtesy of Accra-guesthouse.com.

One thing though, was clear: if all three photographs were indeed of Yaa Asantewaa after her defeat, then they were apparently made to document a vulnerable prisoner of war, possibly being forced to pose for her captors, and so they were in all likelihood taken at the outer border of what I considered to be ethical photographic practice. By which, I mean that I had concerns over the use of photography as a disciplinary instrument of discursive power in relation to subjects constituted through the lens/print mechanism. These photographs had been published as historical source materials that asserted their status as 'evidence' not only through the captions, but also through the iconography. But this 'evidential' context inevitably posed questions about judgement: who was the intended audience?; Why the elaborate staging of the stool?; Did the woman bare her breasts as a sign of defiance towards imperial Christian prurience—or, was it a coerced 'Primitivist' device on behalf of an imperial photographer? I later discovered that, at the same time as I was considering these images, the archaeologist Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann, in her analysis of British colonial photography, had concluded that, particularly when photographed partially naked:

> *Asante women [had] come to encapsulate the body politic; invariably, the implication [was] that Asante women [were] to be conquered and possessed in the same way as the Asante Empire. (Engmann, 2012; 55)*

Certainly, I thought the presence of armed guards in the context of a bitter, year-long war in which thousands had been killed and wounded, implied that it had not been a particularly benign photo 'shoot'. Rather, it seemed to have been an instance of what the Susan Sontag, in her essays on photography, described as the 'aggression implicit in every use of the camera'

(Sontag, 1979; 7) (although, Sontag's stereotypes about 'primitive' photographic subjects, seemed to render her as somewhat complicit) (ibid 85/155). However, despite the absence of total clarity in the provenance of his photographs, Boahen had recalled his visit to the Seychelles in 1972 (Boahen, 2003; 116). His journey had been undertaken to research the exile of the Ashanti monarchy, which, for the survivors, including King Prempeh I, ended in 1924 when they were repatriated to Ashanti. Boahen presented a paper on the subject at the National Cultural Centre in Kumasi during the National Festival of Arts in August of 1977 (Boahen, 1977). I wondered if it was possible that the 'Yaa Asantewaa' photos actually derived, not from the Basel mission but from the Seychelles National Archives, or else from the British Colonial Office. If that was the case, then perhaps the attribution to the Basel Mission was a publisher's mistake. Although Boahen's publisher and editor replied to my enquiries, they were unable to assist in confirming the provenance of the photos.

In view of my uncertainty about the provenance and purpose of these photographs, I resolved to be particularly careful about how I used them, as that would affect the narrative tone and intellectual integrity of my own painting. I wanted to produce an artwork that celebrated the memory of Yaa Asantewaa as a courageous, proud heroine. If the photographs were in fact created as war trophies, coerced from prisoners under threat from a swaggering victor eager to demonstrate mastery, then for me to simply copy them 'as is' might have lead to the unwanted possibility of reinforcing their humiliating intent. My decision then, was to use the Yaa Asantewaa photographs as source material to help determine a historically appropriate hairstyle, costume and physiognomic likeness of her, but that rather than use the image directly in my own work, I would seek a more artistically appropriate way to convey my own vision of the former General.

As I mentioned previously: in order to help establish my painting's motifs, I calibrated the content of the Yaa Asantewaa photographs against other photographs from late-19th and early-20th century Ashanti that were mostly taken by the Swiss missionaries Ramseyer and Perregaux. My specific interest was in how Ashanti noblewomen wore their togas and hair, and how that compared with the photographs of Yaa Asantewaa. In fact, there were a variety of styles adopted by Ashanti people in general. However, women in the images tended to be of lower social rank, or else were Christian converts, which Yaa Asantewaa was not. However, in contrast to the relative frequency of images about noblemen, male monarchs and their male retainers, there was only one image in which an Ashanti woman was identified as a Queen Mother (not counting Yaa Asantewaa, herself). However, this lack of images might have been a reflection of the patriarchal interests of the European, Christian photographers, rather than deriving from the inherent social status of Ashanti noblewomen. Historians and

anthropologists from Ashanti and abroad all agreed with McCaskie's *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante* that, 'Asante was, of course, a matrilineal society' (2003; 147). This meant that male monarchs such as Prempeh I were (and are still) accorded royal status by virtue of their mother's lineage above that of their father's. Royal women, particularly regents and Queen mothers therefore exercised potent forms of political power, and this explained why Yaa Asantewaa was able to assume direct command of the Ashanti military resistance.

In his 2003 paper, *A Provisional Survey of Nineteenth Century Photography on the Gold Coast and in Ashanti'*, the archivist of the Basel Mission's photography collection Paul Jenkins, although unsure of who actually took the photograph, did not doubt that the 1895 image in Fig. 7.12 (below) was of the deposed King Mensa Bonsu sitting alongside his mother and the former Ashanti Queen Mother Afua Kobi (Jenkins, 2005; 110). Although Bonsu had been deposed, the opulence of his and his mother's robes suggested their intention to project an elevated status. In Bonsu's case this was evidenced by his sitting on a chair, in some contexts regarded as a royal symbol, as well as wearing sandals, which in the aristocratic Ashanti photographs I had seen were also often the preserve of royalty. Studying Afua Kobi's close cropped hair and her all enveloping robes informed me that Ashanti noblewomen did not always appear in photographs bare-breasted, and so if I chose to depict Yaa Asantewaa in a less revealing form of dress, this would not be, historically speaking, inappropriate.

Fig. 7.12: Photograph attributed to Fritz Ramseyer, said to be of ex-king Mensa Bonsu and Queen Mother Afua Kobi. c. 1895. Courtesy, Basel Mission Archive.

Taking into account the above analysis about photographs of 19th-century Ashanti noblewomen, I was aware when I made my painting that the most frequently circulated photograph purporting to be about Yaa Asantewaa was the one which appears on the left of

Fig. 7.13 (below). I have illustrated it alongside a monumental 2009 statue in Ghana—which was clearly based on the same photograph.

Fig. 7.13: Left: Anon. Widely circulated, unattested image purporting to be of Yaa Asantewaa; Right: Scott, C. Photograph of 2009 monument to Yaa Asantewaa in Ejisu, Ghana. (2013).

The photographic image had been in online circulation since at least 2006, which was when it first appeared in the Wikipedia commons pages, unsourced and undated, but named as 'Yaa Asantewaa' (Wikimedia, 2006). However, it did not appear in either Boahen's 2003, Edgerton's 1997 or McCaskie's 2003 texts. The fact that it was not in Boahen's work made me wonder whether a historian who devoted much of his life to the study of Ashanti royalty would have failed to have used this striking image if he had thought it was of Yaa Asantewaa?

However, despite that lack of provenance, the reasons for the popularity of the image were clear to see: in the first instance, its uneven quality and monochrome appearance made it seem of antique origin. Also, the figure was wearing a traditional 'bata kari kese' battle dress, of the kind described by Louise Muller in her book about Ghanaian traditions (Muller, 2013; 113). Bata kari kese were reported to have been worn by members of the 19th-century nobility and royalty as a form of light armour, emblazoned with leather pouches containing sacred texts and mystic formulae. Boahen stated that, in 2003 Yaa Asantewaa's own bata kari was 'still preserved at Sreso Timponmu', a town in Ghana (2003; 134). The figure was also carrying a firearm, perhaps similar to that which Boahen said (based on eyewitness reports) that Yaa Asantewaa carried with her during the war—although, he was sure that the commander-in-chief never fought physically as her role was one of strategic oversight. Whatever the provenance of this photograph, there was no doubt that the monument in Ejisu was based on it. It's inscription said

that it was dedicated in 2009, but did not state the sculptor. Instead it announced that it was:

> *…donated to the people of Ghana by Yensomu youth and community development and The African Canadian Community. (Anon IN Scott, 2013)*

Both donors I traced back to a Jamaican-Canadian man called Nene Kwasi Kafele, whose web trails indicated that he had spent years doing voluntary work in Ghana, and amongst the black communities of Canada. However, beyond that there was no further information and I was unable to contact Mr Kafele to learn how the statue was made or by whom.

Nevertheless, with regard to how I composed my painting, the Ejisu sculpture and other Yaa Asantewaa artworks informed me that there was an existing artistic iconography from which I could draw and in relation to which I could position my work. A rifle was present in the Yaa Asantewaa waxwork located in the royal museum at Manhiya Palace in Kumasi, and, also in the gold-painted statue of a very Chinese-looking Queen Mother outside the Yaa Asantewaa Girls' Senior High School in Kumasi (Salaam, 2014). Additionally, in 1994, the African-American illustrator, Barbara-Higgins Bond, created an armed Yaa Asantewaa for the Budweiser-commissioned *Great Kings and Queens of Africa* poster series (Anheuser/Bond, 2014). A consistent motif was the depiction of the commander with her firearm—so I decided, in addition to my hairstyle and dress decisions, to depict Yaa Asantewaa as armed.

7.5 Selecting a contemporaneous British artwork for Yaa Asantewaa to occupy

As I have mentioned, the *Queens of the Undead* painting cycle that I began producing in 2009 included the methodology of appropriating imagery from western painters who were contemporaries of the historical figures I wanted to depict. In part, this functioned as an ironic critique of the 'blind eye' that many western history painters turned towards the genocide, colonialism and racism perpetrated by the elites they served, or worse still, which some artists actually exploited to produce their work.

An example of this methodology, concerning western artistic exploitation, occurred in my 2010 painting, *When Shall We 3? (Scenes from the Life of Njinga Mbandi)*, which appropriated imagery from a painting in the National Gallery by the 17th-century Dutch painter Frans Post. He was commissioned to accompany the Dutch invasion of Portuguese Brazil, and, the painting of his, which I meticulously copied into mine, was called '*Landscape in Brazil*' (c. 1665–9). My work was a celebration of the Angolan anti-colonial heroine, Njinga Mbandi, who was intimately involved in the imperial struggles between Portugal, Southern Africa, Holland and Brazil. The art historian Rebecca Brienen, an authority on Dutch-Brazilian art wrote that Post's paintings:

> *offered [the Dutch-Brazil Governor, Count Johann Mauritus,] a view of a beautiful, fertile, well-*

> *ordered, and conquered Brazil that… allowed him to possess the country "body and soul". (Brienen, 2001)*

But, Brienen also noted that Post's paintings were 'highly selective in what they offer the viewer' because his images of carefree, enslaved Africans appeared at first sight to be idyllic, despite the fact that '*Brazil was notorious* for the high rate of slave mortality due to the harsh conditions in the fields and sugar mills' (ibid) [my emphasis]. Although, I was not aware of Brienen's writing when I appropriated Post's work, I had understood how the artist seemed to simultaneously exploit and sanitize colonial oppression in order to pursue his art, which was why I appropriated his painting as a particularly relevant counterpart to my Njinga figure. (Although, in fact, Post's painting also included an anaconda eating an armadillo, which was perhaps intended as symbolic of a more disturbing vision).

However, my strategy of 'historically contemporaneous appropriation' in the *Queens of the Undead* series also functioned to mark my artistic appreciation of the pictorial effectiveness of particular paintings. Thus, taking the complexities of my *Queens of the Undead* methodology into account, one of the key artistic decisions I needed to make for my proposed Yaa Asantewaa painting was to select artwork created by contemporaries of the Ashanti Queen Mother. This I achieved through the *Africana Unmasked* methodology, which had narrowed and clarified my options: I would use an artwork in Tate's British collection—and it would be an artwork which did not overtly depict Africana.

Consequently, when I visited Tate Britain's exhibition *Migrations: Journeys into British art* in 2012, and was reacquainted with Sargent's 1884 *Study of Mme Gautreau*, I registered it's strikingly original composition—featuring a proud, attentive, solitary, female figure in contraposto and profile—as a possible candidate for appropriation. And, as a recognisable Tate-owned British artwork it also had the methodological advantage, in terms of my *Queens of the Undead* cycle, of having been made during the turbulent lifetime of Yaa Asantewaa.

However, in order for an appropriation to function within the unmasking Africana methodology, I needed to establish whether Sargent's *Study* also embodied 'fugitive Africana'. I knew already that Sargent had a strong interest in Africana: that, treading a path laid by the likes of Eugene Delacroix (1798–1863) and William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), he had made Orientalist, Africana paintings such as the enigmatic *Fumee D'Ambre Gris,* which he started in the city of Tetuan on his journey through Morocco in 1880. Yet, neither the caption in Tate Britain's *Migrations* exhibition, nor the catalogue text by the Tate curator Emma Chambers, mentioned the *Study of Mme Gautreau* having any Africana connection. Therefore, if I was to produce an 'unmasking' appropriation of Sargent's *Study*, I would need to begin with the first

of my methodological phases, Critical Reading, in order to find out whether or not the painting had a 'fugitive' Africana element to it. What I discovered was that the *Study of Mme Gautreau*, represented a particularly compelling example of masked, fugitive Africana which, I thought, would facilitate a vibrant layer of critical practice when elements of it were appropriated for *Yaa Assantewaa Inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu* (see Chapter 8).

7.6 Painting methods for Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu

Fig. 7.14: Preparing the surface of Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu. Photo by: Donkor, K., 2012.

Because I wanted my *Yaa Asantewaa* painting to produce a strongly mimetic sense of individual portraiture, my first task was to stretch the large canvas on a wooden frame. This created a flat, taut surface on which I could produce a highly detailed image without having to contend with the irregularities, which a radically uneven surface produces. However, the woven texture of the cloth itself was also uneven, so to smooth it I applied a thick gesso, as illustrated in fig. 7.14 (above). As I recounted in Chapter 3, I did not consider this practice to be a eurocentric model of painting, but was, a reinterpretation and reclamation of similar methods developed in Africa in approximately 1270 BCE (Pinch, G., 1993).

Fig. 7.15: Left: Donkor, K. Self-portrait preparing paints using palette knife and palette. Photgraph. Right: Donkor. K. Studio photograph of the grisaille and canvas for 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu'. 2012.

Next, I prepared prepared my paints and oil paint mediums for the application of a grisaille as the first layer of underpainting (see fig. 7.15). Then, using a projector, I projected an image from the photographic studies of my sitter onto the surface of the canvas to use as a guide to assist in creating the necessary scale and proportions for my composition. Consequently, I was able to create a 'grisaille' underpainting of the figure, which I have illustrated in the right hand photograph of fig. 7.15 see above. Then, once the grisaille was established, I mixed a further series of pigments to enable me to establish the iconography of the painting in greater detail.

7.8 Iconography of 2nd version of my Yaa Asantewaa painting

Fig. 7.16: From left to right: Donkor, K., Second version of 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu' (detail) 2014; Sargent, Study of Mme Gautreau; Donkor, K., First version of 'Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu' (2012). (Photos by K.Donkor)

At the start of this chapter, I noted that, after completing the first version of my Yaa Asantewaa painting in 2012, I undertook a sustained period of critical reflection. The 2012 painting (which is illustrated to the far right side of fig. 7.16) did sufficiently fulfil some of the criteria that my methodology deemed necessary for the critical effectiveness of an unmasking artwork. Firstly, it had a number of recognisable Africana motifs: the colours of the Republic of Ghana national flag were denoted across the surface; a lifelike portrait of a model of African heritage; a black toga similar to those worn by Ashanti noblewomen in the late-19th century; and, a representation of my 2007 photograph of the Ghanaian countryside. Secondly, there were motifs appropriated from the 'masking' artwork by Sargent. These included: the contraposto; the twist of the right arm; the emphatic profile; the slant of the upper edge of her dress across the chest; the angle of cloth at the right waist; and, the use of only one shoulder support for the long black toga.

However, some of the differences to Sargent's figure made my motif less recognisable as an appropriation. Obviously, the portrait, including her complexion, was drawn from a completely different woman, and also her right hand held a shotgun instead of a table edge. But, these were motifs necessary to establish my figure as a representation of Yaa Asantewaa, the Ashanti military commander. Beyond those necessary motifs of détournement, which

functioned to symbollically reverse significations in Sargent's work, there were other more subtle changes that were not necessary for the identification of Yaa Asantewaa, but did diminish resemblances to the *Study of Mme Gautreau*. Of particular concern was the left arm and hand of my figure—much of her arm was obscured by the toga, and because her hand gathered up this drapery, her left wrist was flexed. In addition, by trying to reproduce the withered appearance of her figure in Yaa Asantewaa's photographs, I had made her neck seem so slender that it appeared to weaken the posture of her head, by comparison with Sargent's more assertive head posture. Finally, by allowing the toga to become too voluminous around the right of my figure's torso, the effect of seeming to lean back and to her right—which was so clearly evident in Sargent's work—was not clear enough in my painting.

The cumulative effect of these differences with the posture and costume of Sargent's image meant that my figure's status as a recognisable appropriation of Sargent's work was mimetically compromised. And, in reducing the recognisability of motifs drawn from the Tate collection painting, I thought my artwork was less effective at establishing a critical interaction between the Africana motifs and the *Mme Gautreau* motifs—which was key to my methodology for unmasking fugitive Africana (see Chapter 4, section 4.4 on 'critical reflection'). However, I did not reach those conclusions until several months after the painting had been finished and the paint had dried. So, in 2013, I decided that, rather than overpaint or remove and repaint large areas, I would produce a second version.

In fig. 7.16 (above), a comparision of the second version—in the far left image—with the other two, reveals how I changed my composition to resemble Sargent's more closely. Firstly, the left arm was no longer obscured by the toga and the left wrist was extended. The new figure did not carry a fan, but her fingers gather the cloth in a similar manner. Secondly, the neck was more robust, giving my figure's head a more assertive-looking posture. And finally, the dress was gathered more closely to the right torso and hip, creating a stronger correlation to the bodice of Mme Gautreau's dress. This gave the new figure a more pronounced sense of leaning back and to her right, and a more convincing contraposto. Furthermore, I introduced an earth-coloured area of ground on which the figure stands—and, the contour of that area alluded to the lower table-shelf in the sister painting to the *Study of Mme Gautreau* (see Fig 8.1, below).

By introducing these elements in the second version of my painting, I thought, on renewed reflection, that it produced a stronger sense of resemblance to Sargent's composition. This made the interaction between Africana motifs and motifs appropriated from Sargent's work more evident, and, therefore, more likely to produce the 'historically resistant subjectivity' necessary for critically unmasking fugitive Africana.

7.9 Summary of Chapter 7

I began Chapter 7 by describing my artistic intentions for *Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu*. These included, on the one hand, creating a work that would represent the role of the Ashanti military commander during the 1900 anti-colonial war of resistance, and on the other hand, making a painting that appropriated and synthesized motifs from Sargent's *Study of Mme Gautreau*.

Then, I made a detailed analysis of the visual source materials used to create the painting, including colonial-era photography, my own photographic life studies, my own photographic landscape studies, the Ghanaian national flag and prior artworks about Ghana's national heroine. I also made a detailed side-by-side comparison between my painting and Sargent's. I discussed some of the textual source material about Yaa Asantewaa's biography and produced a commentary about the provenance and signification of photographs and other artworks said to be of her or, about her.

Next, I described and illustrated some of the technical methodologies which I used to produce my paintings. I concluded the chapter with a detailed description of my process of critical reflection and how that compelled me to create a second version of the painting with an altered iconography, which I thought resembled Sargent's motifs more closely, and thereby increased the effectiveness of the painting as an instance of unmasked Africana.

CHAPTER 8: READING FUGITIVE AFRICANA IN SARGENT'S 'STUDY OF MME GAUTREAU'

What follows is a summary of what I learned, through the 'Critical Reading' phase of my unmasking methodology, about Sargent, the painting, and his sitter—including my understanding of how they had been contextualised by writers and institutions over the past 130 years, particularly with regard to Africana and the painting's conditions of existence.

Fig. 8.1: Sargent, J.S., 'Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau)'. 1884. Oil paints on canvas. Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum New York.

8.1 Portrait painting and the 19th century European self

My interest in the discursive formation of Madame Gautreau's biography arose from my intuition that the sitter's narrative would probably have performed artistic, art-historical and hence, even curatorial functions in relation to the iconography and iconology of the *Study of Mme Gautreau*. Such biographical functions would, in part, have been derived from the

painting, but also from Sargent discourse in general—because portraiture formed such a significant element of his practice—and, particularly, because his sitters were from the social elites of Britian, France and the United States. Inevitably, some of the 'conditions of existence' for such works stemmed directly from his sitters' social status, that is, from those biographical conditions which gave them the means and the desire to commission (or consent to) a leading society-portraitist's representation.

One overt example of the intersection of biography with portraiture was Sargent's 1904 commission for *Sir Frank Swettenham* (1850–1946), which included motifs symbolising the sitter's history as a latter-day British conquistador in what is (now) the Republic of Malaysia. One of the leading Sargent experts, (and also, his great nephew) Richard Ormond, noted that the painting's references to Swettenham's violent, imperial exploits in the 1870s (such as, a leopard skin rug, sword and pith helmet) were so numerous that, 'one might suspect Sargent of irony in piling up the emblems of empires so ostentatiously' (Ormond, 1998; 167). However, although Ormond dismissed the possibility of such irony, the U.S. historian Christopher Capozzola claimed, in his perceptive review of Ormond's catalogue for the 1998 touring Sargent exhibition, that:

> *There were… multiple silences in the recent Sargent show: about the artist and his sitters…the exploitative social practices of class, gender, and empire that funded the portraits were in turn legitimated by those portraits and ultimately erased or silenced many of the victims of those processes. (Capozzola, 2000; 528)*

So, I thought of the Swettenham painting as an instance of Sargent's portraiture entwining with his sitter's biography in four distinct ways: firstly, in the commissioning of the work by the Straits Association (an imperialist institution); then, in the motifs Sargent included in the work; thirdly, in the work's cataloguing and curatorship and also, in Capozzola's critique of Sargent, Swettenham and Ormond as complicit in glorifying colonialism. Further reading led me to understand this interaction between biography and naturalistic portraiture in terms of the shifting values attached to portraiture during Sargent's career.

Early in the 19th century, the genre had been regarded as of less value than history painting: a view promulgated by, for example, the 17th-century French Academician André Félibien (1619 –1695) (Halliday, 2000; 5) and reaffirmed, with caveats, by the British President of the Royal Academy Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his 1769–1790 *Discourses on Art* (1997). Nevertheless, portraiture held a more esteemed position than landscape, genre painting and still life, with its prestige resting, according to art historian Joanne Woodall, on the notion that:

> *the raison d'etre of these images was actually to represent sitters as worthy of love, honour, respect and authority. It was not just that the real was confused with the ideal, but that divine virtue was*

the ultimate, permanent reality. (Woodall, 1997; 3)

Ormond asserted that Sargent did indeed, like Reynolds, paint his sitters to 'look nobler, more beautiful, more assured than they were in reality' (1998; 36) and this encouraged my view that behind celebratory, mythological masks of nobility other, hidden aspects of a sitter's biography became 'fugitive'—aspects which could then be 'unmasked' through my artworks.

I learnt that, necessarily, with political and technical change, particularly the French Revolution of 1789 and the invention of photography in 1839, the Academic system of representation faced a series of crises over who or what was worthy of noble representation, as well as over how they might best be represented. The art historian Anthony Halliday argued persuasively that rising bourgeois aspirations in the post-revolutionary era greatly stimulated the private market for portrait paintings, despite anxieties over their suitability for public exhibition (2000; 2). The art theorist John Berger, writing in 1969, affirmed the view that because photography was a more time-efficient means of representational mimesis and so had undercut painters' markets, it had thereby compelled them:

> *…and their patrons [to invent] a number of mysterious, metaphysical qualities with which to prove that what the painted portrait offered was incomparable. (Berger, 1969; 46)*

Reading further, I discovered Catherine Soussloff had theorized that this search for meaning and value meant the art-historical genre of portraiture itself had become 'an invention, an explanatory system… necessary for the understanding of the modern subject in the portrait' (2006; 15). However, this 'explanatory system', which presupposed a credible, analytic relationship between a portrait and the sitter's biography soon became widely conceived as 'no longer consistently achiev[ing] these effects for us' (Woodall, 1997). Consequently, Berger for example, argued that the 20th-century decline in the critical prestige of naturalistic, painted portraiture arose because:

> *we can no longer accept that the identity of a man can be adequately established by preserving and fixing what he looks like from a single viewpoint in one place. (Berger, 1969).*

However, in his historical practice, this disillusion with the artistic validity of portraiture as a means of representing truth, nobility or beauty was increasingly rejected by the man who was possibly its most successful late-19th century exponent—because, in 1907 Sargent 'went on permanent strike', (to use the phrase which Ormond later used to describe his semi-retirement from the genre—1998; 38). The painter, who had begun to deride his 'paughtraits' (sic) of aristocrats, politicians and industrialists as 'mugs' (his shortened term for 'mug shot') opted to pursue what he regarded as his higher calling: history painting for public murals:

> *No more paughtraits whether refreshed or not. I abhor and abjure them and hope never to do*

> *another especially of the Upper Classes. I have weakly compromised and lately done a lot of mugs in coke and charcoal and am sick of that too, although occasionally the brief operation has been painless. (Sargent IN Charteris, 1927; 155)*

Taking this context into consideration for my critical reading of his *Study of Mme Gautreau*, which I undertook in order to establish its iconological suitability for appropriation into my painting *'Yaa Asantewa',* I did not attempt to accomplish what might be regarded as a futile, psychoanalytic, or even ethical, reading of Sargent's sitter through the image of the painting. Instead, I intended, not so much a psychoanalytic 'moment of phantasised unmasking' (Pointon IN Woodall, 1997), but rather, an informed, artistic unmasking that attempted to uncover 'exploitative social practices' which, as Capozolla had proposed in relation to Sargent, were being 'erased' by the artist's celebration, and also by historiographic celebrations of the sitter/painting's supposed 'beauty'.

8.2 An introduction to John Singer Sargent and his Mme Gautreau works

With regard to unmasking interpretations of Sargent's work, although he was one of the most institutionally and commercially successful fine artists of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, he was not a prolific writer or speaker. He gave one brief interview in 1916 and published one terse letter condemning the Post-impressionists in 1911. But, he did not lecture, take pupils, or write theory—and no written journal had been documented. Whilst he corresponded with his many friends and colleagues, some of which was published; correspondence sent to him was lost as, 'most of the few private papers found at the time of his death appear to have been destroyed'—probably, by members of his family (Ormond, 1970; 1). Although he was not at all reclusive, Sargent never married and nobody (as of 2015) had yet been securely identified as a lover. Therefore, much of his biography and specifically, his artistic motivations, were pieced together from correspondence, cuttings and anecdotes.

This biographical reconstruction was carried out firstly by his friend Sir Evan Charteris (1864–1940) who wrote *John Sargent* in 1927 soon after the painter's death—and then by Charles Merrill Mount (1928–1995) who, even though his *John Singer Sargent* was not published until 1955, had also interviewed surviving informants. However, since the 1970s there had developed an extensive Sargent literature, with the biographer Stanley Olson (1986) and art historians Richard Ormond (1970, 1998), Patricia Hills (1986), Elaine Kilmurray (1998, 2014) and Trevor Fairbrother (1981, 2000) foremost amongst the many, secondary sources—all of which informed my reading.

In 1856, John Singer Sargent was born in Florence, Italy: the eldest surviving son of well-to-do émigré American parents from New England who lived an elegant, peripatetic lifestyle

embracing European tastes and culture. Sargent's father, Fitzwilliam, was a surgeon who had given up his Philadelphia practice when his wife Mary received an inheritance which allowed them to indulge in permanent tourism. Multilingual and (as he described himself) a 'prodigiously talented' naturalistic draughtsman and colourist, the young John was educated entirely in Europe (Kilmurray, 1998). Aged 18 in 1874, he joined the prestigious Paris atelier of the French painter Carolus-Duran and, simultaneously he enrolled in what was arguably the most important art academy in Europe, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts—also in Paris.

Sargent's early-career forays into the fiercely competitive world of public exhibiting won him swift praise and by his mid-twenties he was a seasoned veteran of the Paris Salon, which was the premiere annual art exhibition in France, if not the entire western world. He had secured by 1884 a number of prestigious portrait commissions from wealthy Paris residents such as the wife of the Chilean Consul Madame Ramón Subercaseaux, which also won an award for portraiture at the 1881 Paris Salon. Therefore, in the early 1880s Sargent was an ambitious, young, well-connected professional, who by his affinity with the more aesthetically conservative Paris Salon, had distanced himself effectively from the aesthetic reforms of his older contemporaries, the Impressionists, and also those of his close contemporaries such as the even more rebellious post-impressionists like Georges Seurat (1859–1891) and Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) (Seurat's now iconic *Bathers at Asnières* was rejected by the 1884 Paris Salon jury).

Nevertheless, Sargent was a painter who constantly experimented, and who was also friendly with and supportive of some of his Impressionist peers: learning from both Manet and Monet (though never throwing his lot in with them entirely)—and, certainly, he was keen that his work continue to be noticed. In 1883, he persuaded his high-society friends to secure for him a new project: the portrayal of another young American émigré—Madame Pierre Gautreau, (1859–1915)—who, by then married to a French banker, had won a modicum of celebrity as an attractive, eccentrically stylish, Parisian socialite.

The intended work was not a commission, but was created to allow Sargent to express his 'homage' to what he considered to be the sitter's beauty (Sargent, 1883 IN Kilmurray, 1998; 101) and, of course, to garner critical praise at the Salon—probably with the aim of attracting other wealthy patrons. However, the painter struggled for more than a year to create a suitable composition, producing in the meantime many preparatory drawings and an enchanting oil sketch. As a result of these prolonged labours, it was not until early 1884 that he produced two very similar, full-length, life-sized formal portraits in oils, based on sittings at the Gautreau country retreat in Brittany. The one held by the Tate was intended, presumably, as a full-sized replica of the Metropolitan Museum version and, although it was unsigned and

undated, was probably made soon after Sargent completed the original.

The primary compositional differences between the two paintings were that: in the Tate's *Study*, the background and lower portion of the dress were unfinished; there was a sketch to the bottom left; and, most significantly, one dress strap was missing. It was hard to judge the artist's intentions, but certainly, in the *Study*, the sitter's complexion was somewhat different from the first *Madame X*—not as brightly highlighted as the Metropolitan Museum's version—and this, together with other details, was possibly because Sargent never applied his final glazes. Mount speculated that the reason Sargent made the copy was because the laboured alterations apparent in the original did not correspond to his bravura, Velasquez-style, rapid brushstrokes, which he usually produced to indicate his great skill (Mount, 1955; 82).

The principal work, today known as *Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau),* was exhibited at the 1884 Paris Salon and became the subject of discourse and controversy that centred on perceived flaws in the aesthetics and propriety of the figure's posture, appearance and dress (Ormond, 1998). Although Sargent exhibited the painting under the title *Portrait of Mme **** in order to suggest anonymity, in fact, Mme Gautreau's status as a socialite made her easily recognisable amongst the Parisian elite—meaning that some of the negative critique reflected upon her. The accumulation of negative discourse was believed to have had a profound affect on Sargent's career, such that scholarly consensus holds it to have greatly encouraged, if not actually forced him to permanently quit Paris for London in 1886, in search of a more receptive public and clientele (Kilmurray 1998; Chamot 1964). However, the depth of the 'scandal' should not be exaggerated as his work was again selected for the Paris Salon of 1886, and just five years later, in 1889, he served on the Salon jury and was created Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur (Ormond, 1998; 274).

Following his move to London, Sargent dabbled further with impressionist methodologies, but, before long he acquired wealthy new portrait clients in England and the U.S., becoming a Royal Academician in 1897—with the serving U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) and the world's richest businessman, John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937) amongst his hundreds of sitters. The painter kept his two, full-length Gautreau portraits in his studio, neither selling nor exhibiting them until 1905, when the finished painting was shown in London.

In 1916, the United States' greatest museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, bought the *Portrait of Mme **** from the artist—on Sargent's condition that it be exhibited as *Madame X*—and it has been on display ever since. Even after more than twenty years of sustained success as a high-society portraitist, Sargent wrote to the museum's director that, "it is probably the best thing I have done" (Ormond, 1998). The *Study* in the Tate's collection was

on display three times during the present research: once in a themed exhibition, and twice in the main displays.

Although Sargent's reputation as a brilliant modern artist had waxed and waned with fashions in taste, his oeuvre had never sunk into total obscurity: other works were always on view at Tate Britian and major western museums, whilst the New York Gautreau portrait, *Madame X*, still attracted scholarly attention—with the consensus being that it was probably 'Sargent's most famous work' (ibid).

One recent example, comparatively speaking, of the work's continued, high-profile, trans-Atlantic status occurred in 2006, when a major painting exhibition titled *Americans in Paris, 1860–1900,* toured from the National Gallery in London to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and then to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The exhibition featured 37 artists, including the Impressionist Mary Stevenson Cassatt (1844–1926), James Abbot McNeil Whistler (1834–1903) and the African-American, Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937). *Madam X* illustrated the cover of the 320-page catalogue for this blockbuster show and, according to a review by Isabel Taube, when the spectacle arrived in New York, Sargent's work was the "'poster-girl' for the exhibition, and her image appeared in shop windows and on banners throughout the city" (Taube, 2007)[39].

39 As the *African Unmasked* project drew to a close, in 2014–2015, London's National Portrait Gallery staged a three-month exhibition of Sargent's major portrait works, *Portraits of Artists and Friends*, although, on this occasion neither of the Gautreua paintings were in the display. (Ormond, 2015)

8.3 Was the 'Study of Mme Gautreau' a British work of art?

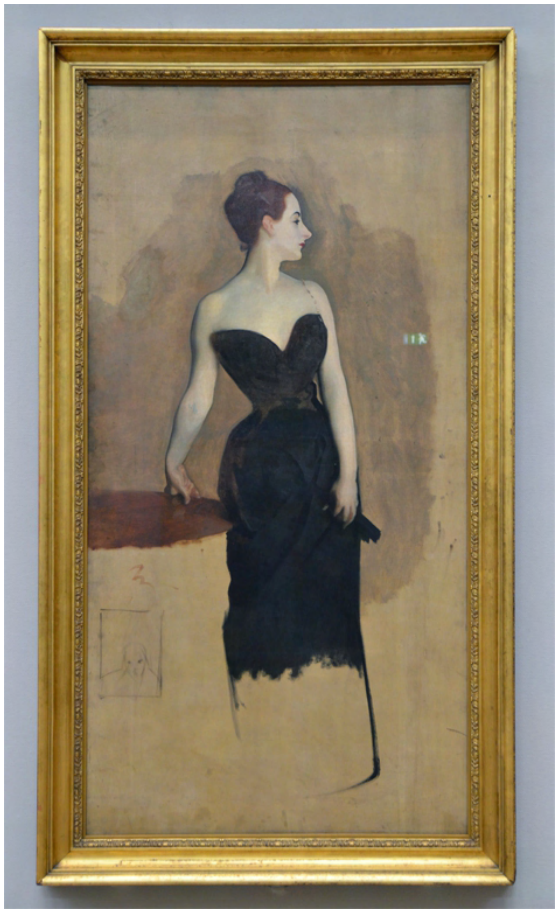

Fig. 8.2: Sargent, J.S., 'Study of Mme Gautreau', 1884. Oil paint on canvas, 2064mm × 1079mm. Photo by Donkor, K., 2014, in Tate Britain's '1840 room'.

Because my project was concerned with unmasking fugitive Africana in Tate's collection of specifically *British* art, and therefore discourses of national identity and race were key to that process, I believed that it was worthwhile scrutinising how the *Study of Mme Gautreau* even qualified as a British work of art—and so, thereby, could legitimately sit within my research parameters. However, from the outset I think it necessary to acknowledge that, although it was almost certainly painted in France in 1884, the *Study of Mme Gautreau* had always been formally classified by Tate as British.

Trevor Fairbrother (1981), agreeing with one of the painter's most thorough biographers, Charles Mount, contended that the Tate's painting was probably a replica of the Metropolitan Museum's *Madame X*, rather than a preparatory 'study' for it—which also suggested that for ninety years it had been consistently misnamed. Mount had noticed that the *Study* incorporated, from its inception, certain compositional elements (such as the position of the right arm), which had been the subject of considerable alteration by Sargent in the completed *Madame X* (Mount, 1955; 82). This indicated strongly that the so-called *Study* had been commenced after *Madame X*'s composition had already been finalized.

Fairbrother though, also reasoned that the *Study's* lack of a righthand dress-strap (see fig. 8.2, above) corresponded with a photograph of *Madame X,* taken when the latter was exhibited at the Paris Salon and showing the strap to be slipping off Gautreau's shoulder (Fairbrother, 1981). Sargent had soon repainted the strap for *Madame X* (see fig. 8.1) in a less suggestive position (his request to do so during the exhibition had been declined) but, he never finished the replica and so never included the sartorial adjustment. This indicated that the *Study* was painted where Sargent lived—in his rather grand, central-Paris studio—just before the 1884 Paris Salon, when he was still uncertain about where to place the dress-strap.

Following Sargent's death in England in 1925, his family withdrew the *Study* from the Christies' sale of his work, after which Sir Joseph Duveen presented it to the Tate Gallery via the Art Fund (Chamot, 1964). At the time of writing, Tate's online-catalogue entry was excerpted from *The Modern British Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture: Volume II, M-Z* (1964) by the curator and art historian Mary Chamot (1899–1993). The title of the catalogue (Modern *British* Paintings…), which was published on behalf of the Tate Gallery, made clear that the *Study* was in 1964 considered by Tate to be a British artwork—and the painting had continued to be shown at Millbank—which, in 2000, became 'the home of British art'.

As indicated earlier, the *Study* was featured in Tate Britain's 2012 exhibition, *Migrations: Journeys into British Art*, and was included in its catalogue discourse on Sargent's transnational biography (Carey-Thomas, 2012). This made clear that under the new Director Penelope Curtis, the painting continued to be regarded as a British artwork. This history informed me that there had never been any apparent institutional hesitation in identifying as 'British' a work which was made in Paris by an Italian-born painter; himself of American parentage and lifelong U.S. citizenship; and which, depicted an American-born woman of American parentage who was married to a Frenchman.

Therefore, it appeared that the 'British art' status of the Tate's *Study* was based on the fact that it was imported into the U.K. by the artist, who became a permanent resident. Conversely, the Metropolitan Museum's *Madame X*—produced in almost identical geographical and historical circumstances—was regarded as an American painting (Burke, 1980; 229) on account of Sargent retaining his U.S. citizenship and his artistic connection with the country, not just in portraiture but also as a muralist and a watercolourist.

8.4 Critical reading and the biography of Sargent's sitter

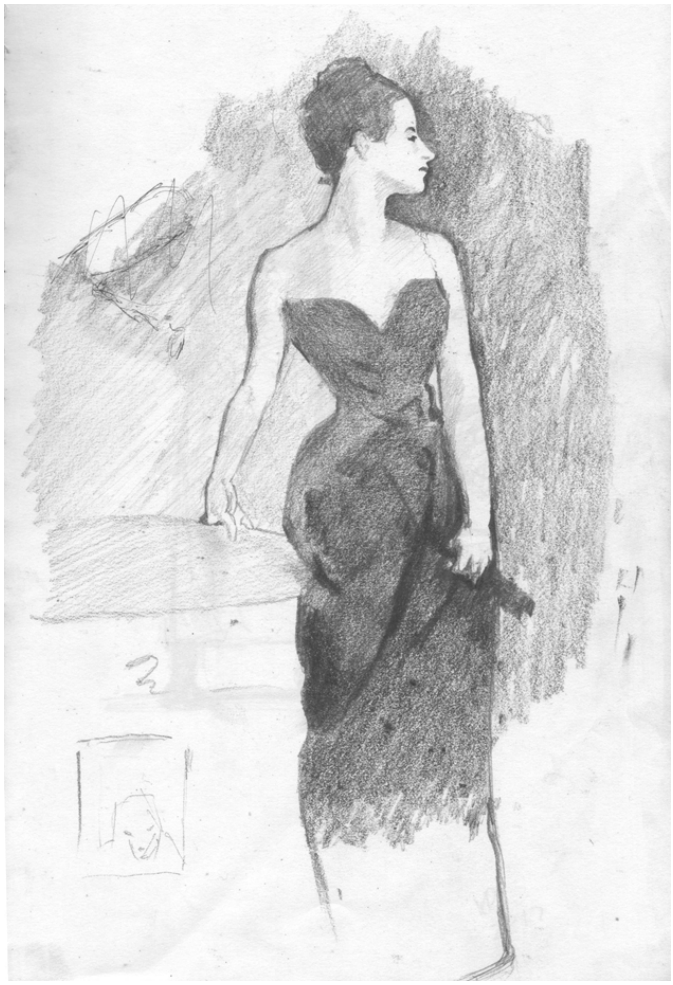

Fig. 8.3: Donkor, K., 'Sargent's Study of Mme Gautreau'. 2012, pencil on paper, 29.7 x 21cm.

As I have said, my practice-led enquiries into discourses of national identity and race were fundamental to the research methodology for unmasking Africana, so I shall now focus on interrogating some of the identity questions associated with Sargent's work and particularly with his sitter, documenting how my methodology of critical reading led me to believe that her biography affirmed Sargent's *Study* as a masking artwork that embodied fugitive Africana.

My sketch of the *Study of Mme Gautreau* (see Fig 8.3, above) was made at Tate Britian in 2012 as part of my research for *Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu*. It enabled me to study and understand tonal, linear, anatomical and iconographical values in Sargent's work, and thereby to select what was most recognisable and suitable for appropriation. As well as establishing the alert, slightly uncertain poise of the figure (who seemed to steady herself on the table), my sketch helped me to confirm a lack of obvious 'Africana' elements.

However, the combination of a head in sharp profile with the frontal elevation of the shoulders reminded me of an Ancient Egyptian method of rendering anatomy. My interpretation was speculative, as there was no record of an intended Egyptian allusion

(although, references to Romano-Hellenic antiquity had been claimed—see Ormond, 1998; 101). Still, the painter had a long interest in Egypt, and his sketch of an Ancient Egyptian figure (see Fig 8.4, below), one of several from 1878, demonstrated familiarity with this African iconography in the years prior to his Gautreau paintings. Other similarities between the painting and his Egyptian sketch included the facts that x-rays show Mme Gautreau's right arm was once raised (Mahon, 2005); that both figures wore a bare shouldered dress; and that Mme Gautreau also wore a tiara and carried an object.

Fig. 8.4: Sargent, J.S., 'Sketch of an Ancient Egyptian figure' (c.1878), pen on paper. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

In my reading of documents about the painting, I first turned to texts that contextualised Sargent's paintings in the spaces where the public encountered the artworks—that is, in texts produced by Tate Britian and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This was because I wanted my own potential 'unmasking' interpretation to be considered in relation to any dominant readings of the work produced by the hegemonic, curatorial institutions. I the compared museum-published texts with each other and also with other art-historical and theoretical writing, in order to produce my own 'resistant decoding' of the painting's iconology. This enabled me to account for my motivations in appropriating particular elements as 'fugitive Africana—that is, to document why I composed *Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu* in its particular way, and no other.

The primary texts through which Tate had contextualised the *Study of Mme Gautreau* for the public included the gallery and online captions; as well as printed and online catalogue entries. At the time of writing, the work was on display with its caption giving only the painting's date,

artist name, title, materials and donor. I considered that this supposedly 'neutral' captioning method conformed to the concept of dominant 'technical encoding', as suggested by Stuart Hall (1980), and it seemed designed to produce a dominant reading of the work's content. I understood the dominant encoding of the painting/caption to imply that the work consisted of an apparently unfinished oil painting, which was 'about' a young, brown-haired (white) woman named Mme Gautreau (so, probably French)—wearing a mid-Victorian shoulder-less black dress, carrying a closed fan and leaning on a table. Because of its presence in the gallery, I also thought that it produced a mythology that signified 'this is a stylish painting by a great, portraitist'. Therefore, my 'curated encounter' with the painting, as informed by the museum caption, did not enable me to identify definitively any Africana in, or through, the work. Subsequently, based on my knowledge of the painting's iconology, the caption's 'technical', dominant, encoding caused me to interpret it as one element in a wider masking process.

However, my next curatorial reading was more helpful, as it was the museum's anonymous, online, image caption, which informed me that Mme Gautreau was the 'American wife of a French banker in Paris' (Tate, 2011). In fact, it was this online statement—that Mme Gautreau was American—which first gave me the intimation that the sitter's biography, and by extension the iconology of the painting, might embody Africana. This ultimately pivotal hunch was based on my prior historical understanding that in the 19th Century the United States had a significant African-American population, and also that the lives of European and African Americans were deeply entwined by the political economy of colonialism and racial slavery—the latter of which was abolished in consequence of the U.S. Civil War of 1861–65.

As a result of this realization I decided to discover in more detail what kind of American Mme Gautreau had been, and so I researched the theme through a range of curatorial texts by both Tate and the Metropolitan Museum. These texts included: Tate curator, Mary Chamot's catalogue entry in *The Modern British Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture: Volume II, M-Z* (Chamot, 1964), which was also reproduced as Tate's online catalogue entry; Tate curator Emma Chamber's essay in the exhibition catalogue *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (Carey-Thomas, 2012); Elaine Kilmurray's essay in the Tate-published catalogue *Sargent* (Ormond, 1998; 101) and the Metropolitan Museum curator, Doreen Bolger Burke's catalogue entry in *American Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Volume 3* (Burke, 1980; 229)—which was also reproduced as the Met's online catalogue entry (MMA, Accessed 2102).

Although Emma Chambers's 2012 text was the most recent and did address questions of nationality and identity, I learnt no additional information. From Mary Chamot (1964; 598), I learnt only that Mme Gautreau's maiden name was Virginie Avengo (sic). This meant that my

next important revelation came from Kilmurray's 1998 catalogue entry, which gave Mme Gautreau's place and year of birth as New Orleans in 1859 (Ormond, 1998; 101). This information was encouraging as, through my research for other Africana artworks, I already knew that New Orleans was a major centre of African enslavement in the Americas, in one of the most repressive slave states—Louisiana—and that 1859 was prior to the abolition of slavery which, was not accomplished until 1863–65.

Consequently, at that stage of my reading, the convergence of these historical circumstances with the bare bones of Mme Gautreau's biography led me to believe that, if I paid closer attention to her narrative, I might discover if there were specific Gautreau-Africana links in Louisiana during the era of racial-slavery, or else afterwards, in the post-Civil War 'Reconstruction' era. I speculated if I might discover that Mme Gautreau was from an abolitionist family who had fled to France—or, that she had African ancestry. Or else, that she had illegitimate, African-American half-siblings—as did the white children of U.S. author, 'founding father' and third President Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) (Finkelman, 1996; 169).

However, my next unmasking advance came from Burke's catalogue entries for the Metropolitan Museum, which informed me that Mme Gautreau's father was Major Anatole Avegno of New Orleans, who had 'died from wounds received at the battle of Shiloh' (Burke, 1980; 229). Burke did not elaborate on the 'battle of Shiloh', but, she did reveal that Mme Gautreau's mother was 'Marie Virginie de Ternant of Parlange Plantation, Louisiana' (ibid). Again, no further details were provided by the museum—however, I knew, based on my prior understanding of American historiography that 'plantation' was probably the Anglo-American euphemism for a slave-labour camp where enslaved Africans would have been forced to cultivate cash crops.

I also already knew that Shiloh was an important engagement in the American Civil War, and so I realised that it was possible that Mme Gautreau's father had died in defence of racial slavery—the Confederate cause of the South. At that stage, I decided that because 19th-century Louisiana plantation slavery and the American Civil War were strongly associated with colonized, African identities, and were also of key significance in the artistically important biography of Mme Gautreau, then the omission or obfuscation of these specific details in the two museums' published texts had tended, collectively, to contribute towards the curatorial masking of potential Africana embodied by the artworks. This was so particularly for Tate because, of the five texts about Mme Gautreau published by the British gallery, none mentioned the U.S. Civil War or the slave-labour camp.

8.5 The Louisiana heritage of Sargent's 'Southern Belle'

Fig. 8.5: Highsmith, C.M., Ternant [now Parlange] Plantation House. c.1980–2000 (Courtesy, Library of Congress: Carol Highsmith Archive)

Feeling frustrated by the dearth of information in the museum-published documents, I widened my reading to include a range of other texts, in order to establish more conclusively whether Mme Gautreau's biography included more specific Africana elements. Among the documents which furnished me with this 'unmasking' information was the only book-length historical biography of Mme Gautreau, which was by the American non-fiction writer Deborah Davis, and was titled *Strapless*—after Sargent's scandalously provocative paintings (Davis, 2003). Also important was Charles Mount's extensive 1955 biography of Sargent. Both of these volumes, but particularly Davis, had based their research findings on primary source evidence: so, Davis documented her visits to sites relevant to Mme Gautreau's biography, including Parlange Plantation house (see fig. 8.5, above), which was still owned by Mme Gautreau's family—as well as to sites in Paris and Brittany where she recounted gaining access to primary source documents about the sitter's life and times.

From this phase of my reading, I learnt that Mme Gautreau's white, American, Creole mother was born on a slave-labour camp on the banks of a Mississippi lake called False River, in the 1830s. Because Mme Gautreau's grandmother was considered by U.S. law to be the 'owner' of not only the land itself, but also the enslaved Africans who worked it, I learnt that at her birth Sargent's sitter became one of the heirs presumptive to the estate, including its enslaved labourers, who were regarded as chattel. According to Davis's research, in 1860, the 10,000-acre plantation was the richest and most powerful in Point Coupee parish and was worth, in

today's money, 'a fortune of tens of millions of dollars' (ibid). Davis specifically acknowledged, based on her reading of plantation records and local history, that at least 147 African people were held as slave labourers by Mme Ternant: 'tending to the animals and the crops… watched by an overseer' (Davis, 2004: 13). According to Herman Seebold, a Louisiana genealogist, those Africans labouring at Parlange were enslaved in the largest sugar-cane production centre in the area (Seebold, 2004; 308).

Fig. 8.6: Anon. Major Anatole Avegno, father of Virginie Amelie Gautreau nee Avegno, wearing his Confederate uniform. c.1861–2. Courtesy, Davis, D., 2003.

At first, the explicit revelation that Mme Gautreau was an heiress to a slave-labour plantation had seemed like a decisive breakthrough of unmasking, compared to what had seemed to be the obfuscation and evasions of the Tate and Metropolitan Museum's curatorial texts. I had demonstrated the effectiveness of the critical reading element of my methodology: that it made sense to read beyond not just the motifs in the painting itself and the opaque museum captions, but also to read beyond both of the two museums' online and printed catalogue entries—if I wanted to unmask fugitive Africana.

It was from Mount and Davis that I learnt Mme Gautreau's father, Anatole Avegno (c.1835–1862), (see fig. 8.6, above) died fighting on behalf of the Confederacy (Mount, 1955; 74 / Davis, 2004; 12). Indeed, as a member of one of New Orleans' wealthiest slaveholding families, he had been such a devotee of the southern cause that he and his brother Jean-Bernard purchased equipment and uniforms to found their very own battalion in the Confederate army (Davis, 2004; 19) known as the 'Avegno Zouaves' (Field, 2006; 12). Jean-Bernard, a politician, was said to have signed Louisiana's secession papers (Davis, 2004; 12).

Although exact dates were not entirely secure, Davis concluded that it was probably two years after the 1865 Union victory, in 1867 (ibid; 14), that Mme Gautreau's mother, following in the wake of her brother-in-law Jean Bernard, permanently relocated with her daughter to Paris—where the two clans, Avegno and Ternant/Parlange had invested some of their Louisiana profits in property (Davis, 2004; 6). I thought that when Virginie Gautreau nee Avegno finally left the United States, she was, aged eight, not culpable for what I regarded as the white-supremacist politics of her adult relatives. What I was certain of though, was the Africana provenance of the sinister, Louisiana fortune which she, her mother, and her uncle retained, and which had facilitated, evidently, the young American's swift entry into the highest echelons of Paris society—where, she came to the attention of her fellow 'American', Sargent.

Furthermore, despite her marriage at the age of 19 to the wealthy 40-year-old banker Pedro 'Pierre' Gautreau, I learnt that Mme Gautreau's status as a Louisiana heiress was an economic legacy which she retained throughout her life. On her engagement, Mme Gautreau had been determined to keep control of her Louisiana wealth, and so the couple signed a 'pre-nuptial' contract in which she and her spouse agreed to maintain their prior holdings independently (Davis, 2004; 29). Consequently, in 1878, Mme Gautreau's personally-owned properties in New Orleans itself were valued at 166,000 francs (ibid; 30). And, despite changes in her fortune she continued to hold on to a sizeable proportion of her American wealth, so that shortly after she died in 1915, her heirs sold her share of the 10,000-acre, former slave-labour camp at Parlange for $20,000 (Davis, 2004; 172).

However, Davis's brief sentence, mentioning only the existence of 147 'slaves' at Parlange, seemed swamped by the 18 pages documenting the wealth, 'beauty' and melodramas of Mme Gautreau's Louisiana existence. And, that one sentence proved to be the full extent of Davis's, and (to my knowledge) all other biographical and art-historical discursive engagement with the lives of those African people. That is to say, amongst the dozens of other art-historical texts that I subsequently read about Mme Gautreau and Sargent's paintings of her (his 'most famous' work), I never discovered any acknowledgement that the enslaved people exploited by the Parlange/Avegno clans even existed, let alone any consideration of what role they played in the fortunes of Mme Gautreau and her family.

In this respect, then, I came to consider Sargent's paintings and the various museum texts as particular instances of a wider, art-historical discourse of masking, through which, as Capozzola had intimated, 'exploitative social practices… were erased or silenced' (2000). However, Davis's scant mention did propel me to pursue other lines of enquiry from disciplines beyond art history and popular biography, which I thought multiplied the ways that

the *Study of Mme Gautreau* had masked its fugitive Africana, and thereby could serve to multiply the ways I would be able to create 'unmasking' artworks.

So, from Davis I had learnt that at her wedding Mme Gautreau was 'walked down the aisle' by her maternal uncle Charles Parlange Jr, who, according to Davis had travelled to France with the bride's grandmother—the Creole matriarch who still owned the plantation (Davis, 2004; 31). Mme Gautreau's grandmother controlled the estate on behalf of the family until her death in 1887, from which time it's administration was led by Mme Gautreau's uncle Charles—so that the Parlange/Avegno/Gautreau clan became absentee landlords renting to tenants—according to the National Parks Service of the United States, which listed the plantation as a 'National Historic site' (NPS, accessed, 2012). Given that Mme Gautreau retained her economic interests in the giant Louisiana plantation and its Africana workforce before, during and after her work with Sargent, I decided it was necessary through my unmasking methodology to learn more about her family's political/economic relationship to those Africans whose exploitation enabled the clan to gain privileged access to the 'means of representation' in the artworld and media.

After the Civil War, political advances made by formerly enslaved African-American agricultural labourers during the brief period of 'Reconstruction' were undermined when white plantation owners, in alliance with other white classes, used their economic power coupled with terrorist 'Ku Klux Klan' violence, to reinstate a form of racial tyranny known as 'Jim Crow' or Segregation. According to the historian Justin Nystrom, writing in his 2010 book *New Orleans after the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom,* the emancipation of Africans was replaced by: 'a modern system of apartheid that codified white, personal, space and enacted into law a system of social deference' (Nystrom, 2010; 245).

By conducting my own archival research in the California Digital Library, I discovered that Mme Gautreau's clan provided a specific example of this 'apartheid' process, because Charles Parlange Jr, the man who walked Mme Gautreau down the aisle and administered the family's plantation, became a leading figure in the political movement known as 'White Supremacy'. At his speech to the 1890 Anti-Lottery Democratic Convention, Parlange openly declared that:

> *The prosperity of Louisiana and of the whole South depends on the supremacy of the white over the black race. (Parlange IN ALDC, 1890; 54)*

However, I also learnt that Parlange's white-supremacist ideology was not the mere rhetoric of a marginalized radical: because, shortly after his 1890 speech, he was elected Louisiana's Lieutenant Governor and also went on to administer the avowedly white-supremacist tyranny over African-Americans through his role as a Louisiana Supreme Court Judge (F.J.C.,

[Accessed 2012]). In other acts of critical reading, I learnt that Parlange's white supremacy did not represent a sudden conversion, but was instead a public attempt to vindicate his clan's history of racist brutality, which had already been publicly documented with regard to the antebellum slave-labour camp.

The historic documentation of specific, Parlange slave-labour-camp brutality had been revisited in 1872, when the American historian William Still published his 800-page book *The Underground Railroad*, which was his account of the pre-Civil War, abolitionist campaign to liberate, bodily, Africans from southern slavery. The campaign, known popularly as the 'Underground Railroad' had organised safe passage, refuge and advocacy for those willing to break state and federal laws by fleeing the plantations and attempting to live as free citizens. Still had served, first as the Secretary and then as the Chairman of the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society's Underground Railroad branch, which was known formally as the 'General Viglance [sic] Committee'. The American literary historian Ian Finseth recounted that Still:

> *…conducted regular interviews with the runaway slaves who came through Philadelphia, taking copious notes on their experiences and diligently recording their stories. (Still, 2007; vi)*

One refugee whom the Committee interviewed was a 43-year-old man, James Conner, who testified in 1857—two years before Mme Gautreau's birth to the Parlange/Ternant/Avegno clan and shortly after her mother's wedding (ibid; 403). Whereas Sargent's Gautreau paintings and the art history which validated them, had produced a 'genteel' silence about conditions at Parlange, Conner provided me with a first-hand counter-narrative, confirming certain details of the Gautreau historiography, but from the perspective of an enslaved African. Conner had experienced stark (but unexceptional) brutality in his struggle to endure and then to escape Parlange—having been shot by the labour camp's managers on four separate occasions (ibid). According to him, punishment shootings were 'no uncommon thing in Louisiana' (ibid; 404). He painted a vivid contrast between the luxuriant lives of Mme Gautreau's clan, with their extended trips to Paris (ibid)—as distinct from the lives of Africans, whom Conner claimed were often 'almost whipped to death' and occasionally were killed by their 'masters' (ibid; 403).

Apparently, Conner, by winning the trust of his tormentors was promoted to an 'overseer' position, and it was in that complicit capacity he accompanied Charles Parlange Sr on a slave-buying mission to Virginia, from which he was able to effect his final escape during a stop in Philadelphia. However, the incident was not a clandestine affair because on July 27th 1857, an abolitionist journal called the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* published a letter about 'Mr Charles Parlange' and his attempts to recapture Conner by hiring bounty hunters and claiming the refugee had stolen money (Still, 1872; 405). The Viglance Committee assisted Conner, and

Still also printed a letter from colleagues in Canada confirming the escapee's arrival in the emancipated British Empire. During his testimony, Conner had described Mme Gautreau's grandfather as 'barbarous', and her step-grandfather Parlange as 'the worst', and although he claimed that Mme Gautreau's grandmother —his 'owner'— had been 'well-liked', he was also clear that she was manipulative and duplicitous (ibid; 404).

Reading James Conner's story put Charles Parlange Jr's 1890 advocacy of 'white supremacy' into a much clearer perspective. It seemed that he was pursuing in the tradition of his father, what Foucault (in *Society Must Be Defended*, his book about the history of racism) had described as a perpetual 'race war'—which, according to Foucault, had underpinned political and historical discourse in western societies (Foucault, 2004; 64). The fact that Mme Gautreau was a lifelong beneficiary of the fruits of Parlange Plantation meant that she seemed to be complicit in this trans-Atlantic, racial war—and that portraits of her were in a very real sense the artistic 'fruits' of that trans-generational conflict. Throughout her life her economic power was maintained at the expense of African-American, post-Reconstruction labourers at Parlange, who had been exploited by her family's self-proclaimed system of white supremacy —which she never seemed to have disavowed or attempted to reform or disown.

That there were African-Americans working on Parlange after the Civil War, was confirmed for me by the account of the amateur genealogist Patricia Bayonne-Johnson, who learnt that her great-grandfather, Jules Bayonne, worked as a domestic servant there in the 1870s (Bayonne-Johnson, 2011). Therefore, my critical reading of the social conditions of existence for Sargent's *Study of Mme Gautreau* led me to believe that without her family's enslavement of Africans in America, and their exploitation of the wealth generated by Louisiana's white-supremacist tyranny, it was certain that the painting would not have been made—as she would not have been in France, where she attracted Sargent's attention as a high-society sitter.

To the extent that the *Study of Mme Gautreau* itself—as well as the art historical, curatorial and biographical texts about it—tended to obscure, minimise, omit or evade reference to those conditions of its existence, I regarded the painting as an instance of specific 'masked Africana'. My discovery of a 'masking' function did not mean I knew why Sargent seemed to omit overt references to Mme Gautreau's Africana history—unlike, for example, his profusion of Orientalist motifs in the *Swettenham* portrait (Sargent, 1904). Rather, it meant that, viewing the work using a hegemonic, dominant encoding—as simply an account of her supposed style and beauty—had seemed to offer little in the way of motifs about her history and social role in relation to Africana—unless, I was prepared to rethink the question of race and whiteness in relation to the art history of western portraiture.

8.5 Working 'like a nigger': ideological whiteness and *Study of Mme Gautreau*

Although, I thought that Mme Gautreau's economic capital, which was inextricably bound up with the creation of Sargent's *Study*, empowered me to conclude that the work was a form of masked Africana, my critical reading of the painting itself and of the discourses in which it had become enmeshed, led me to ask further questions: was economic capital the only form of Africana which Mme Gautreau's clan and Sargent himself derived from the Americas? What about 'cultural capital' in the form of the exploitative, racial ideas and attitudes towards Africans and whites that were generated in the slave system? Sargent had overtly represented his sitter using a sharp tonal contrast between, on the one hand, the black dress and mid-toned background space, and on the other hand, the pale colours used for her skin. Perhaps, if I had allowed myself to be overwhelmed by the hegemonic discursive context, Sargent's methodology might not in this respect have been of particular significance. However, what I also discovered during my critical reading was that, beginning in the historical period immediately before Sargent's paintings were even started, right up until the present time of writing, writers (all of them, white) in the fields of art theory, art criticism, art history, curatorship and biography had consistently produced a complex discourse of 'ideological whiteness'—specifically with regard to Sargent's Mme Gautreau portraits.

The notion of an 'ideology of whiteness' (Babb, 1998; 44) was formulated by the American cultural historian Valerie Babb in her book *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (1998). She regarded ideological whiteness as a hegemonic discourse that tried to construct the multi-racial U.S. as both a descendant of and a rival to an exclusively white, European modernity. She contextualized this contested hegemonic discourse within a late-19th-century national project that included the dispossession of Native American lands, mass immigration from Europe and the disenfranchisement of African Americans—in other words, with a dominant view that not just ideals of beauty, but also ideals of progress and modernity were to be constituted by an idealized, normalized, white, national identity. Because Babb regarded the ideology of whiteness as forming a key element of what Antonio Gramsci had identified as 'social hegemony' (ibid, 41)—by which, capitalist societies maintained mass compliance—her theory extended into visual art institutions, contending that: 'museums… eternize the artistic and historical visions of white-skinned peoples' (ibid; 44). Interestingly, Babb cited John Singer Sargent's artwork as complicit in a heavily gendered, visual construction of ideological whiteness (Babb, 1997; 133).

Further readings informed me that what Babb described as the 'ideology of whiteness' had been also explored by texts in an inter-disciplinary academic field that had been named 'Critical Race Theory', and which included a sub-section, 'Whiteness Studies', that could trace

a dialogic genealogy through Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (1969); from thence to Theodore Allen's *Class Struggle and the Origin Of Racial Slavery: The Invention Of The White Race*, (1975); David Roediger's, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991); to Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993) and Richard Dyer's *White* (1997).

More recent writers from the 1990s onwards had noticed how a whiteness discourse seemed to produce a double consciousness that celebrated the hegemonic beauty, wealth, power and intellect of whites, whilst tending to avoid not only the explicit 'white supremacist' positions of Charles Parlange Jr, but also any meaningful discourse with regard to race. Morrison had critiqued the avoidance of serious racial discourse in literary criticism as 'studied indifference' (Morrison, 1993; 9). However, in the period since then, such indifference in the field of art history had also been challenged. Accordingly, the art historian Martin Berger in his 2005 book *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* had echoed Morrison's concern, claiming that white art historians had 'developed similarly oblivious art historical methods'. Berger had focussed on paintings (which he called 'texts'), some of which (just like the *Study of Mme Gautreau),* featured only 'white' figures, and consequently he noticed that:

> *Although whites did not see race as an issue in any of my primary texts, they nevertheless responded to the works in ways that betrayed their investment in being white. (Berger, M., 2005; 8)*

Along with Berger, other white art historians had attempted to reject their 'investment in being white' in order to 'see' race in critically productive, counter-hegemonic terms. In her 2004 essay, Angela Rosenthal developed a theory of whiteness in English portraiture of the late-18th Century as:

> *a cultural battleground of diverse competing claims to gendered, nationalized and racialized selfhood, that had emerged in the context of slavery, black immigration and abolitionism (Rosenthal, 2004).*

And, this 'battleground' was associated specifically with Sargent's work by the white, British art historian Andrew Stephenson, who had remarked that Sargent's portrait *The Earl of Dalhousie* (1900) 'requires us to attend to… the visibility of white skin as a privileged signifier of racial identification' (Stephenson, 2005). Commenting on the ambivalent reception to *Madame X*, Stephenson, in his essay *'A keen sight for the sign of the races': John Singer Sargent,* felt that some English critics judged all portraiture according to a tradition:

> *in which purity and whiteness were linked to Antique precedents and readily conflated with idealized tropings of Anglo-English femininity. (Stephenson, 2005; 220)*

However, I found Stephenson's realisation—that Sargent's portraits of Mme Gautreau were

apt for a critique of ideological whiteness—to have been a singular exception. Overwhelmingly, most commentators had tended to regard the paintings in ways that did not attend critically to race, but which nevertheless 'betrayed an investment in being white'.

I discovered though, that this racialized investment had, in the first instance been galvanized by Mme Gautreau herself through her much-remarked upon, cosmetic, skin-whitening regime, and that the subject of her whiteness had then been pursued contemporaneously by artists and commentators—including Sargent and his critics, as well as by later historians.

For example, I learnt that one early Gautreau text exhibiting an ideology of whiteness had been an anonymous, 1880 article in the *New York Herald* about Mme Gautreau's role as a Parisian socialite. Titled *La Belle Americaine* [the beautiful American], and in gender stereotyped and objectifying terms, the writer declared of the 21-year-old that: 'one is literally stunned by her beauty… a Canova statue transmitted into flesh and blood…' (IN Diliberto, 2003; L1409). The reference to 'a Canova statue' alluded to the neoclassical, Venetian sculptor Antonio Canova (1757–1822), famed for his idealized nudes made from white marble. Thus, by referring to Mme Gautreau's 'flesh' as beautiful and likening her to a Canova statue, the *New York Herald* writer appeared to be participating in a racialized, hegemonic discourse of ideal beauty as 'classical' (signifying of ancient European 'blood'), and white (from Canova's white marble).

Sargent, too, became invested in how best to represent the whiteness of his sitter's complexion. In 1883, after he had probably met Mme Gautreau in 1881–2, he wrote to his close friend, the writer Vernon Lee (1856–1935), using the terms 'blotting paper', and 'lavender or chlorate of potash lozenge' to describe Gautreau's complexion, and stating his desire to paint her 'great beauty' (Kilmurray, 1998; 101). Sargent's references to the white, industrial products, 'blotting paper' and 'chlorate of potash', were euphemisms for a pale complexion, whilst the term 'lavender' referred to the pale lavender powder which Mme Gautreau reputedly applied as a kind of blue-grey foundation to neutralise her complexion, particularly in artificial light (Sidlauskas, 2001; 11).

According to Davis, in all likelihood, Mme Gautreau used ordinary, cosmetic, white-rice powder to whiten her complexion (2004; 56), but in my reading of the painting itself, it seemed obvious that Sargent's motives (with Gautreau's complicity) for selecting a black dress and dark background must have been to emphasize by means of tonal contrast the whiteness of the sitter's complexion. Infamously, Édouard Manet (1832–1883) had deployed this long-standing device of drawing attention to the pallor of white women's skin by painting a black cat, and a black woman, for his own, similarly scandalous painting, the racially charged *Olympia* (1863). And Sargent was said to have significantly repainted the figure's complexion in *Madame*

X after his visit to the Manet retrospective exhibition at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1883 (Ormond, 1998; 115).

After *Madame X* went on display in 1884, several critical texts in Paris and London discussed Sargent's painting of whiteness in negative terms: including the art critic Henri Houssaye (1848–1911) who dismissed Sargent's rendering of Gautreau as 'pallid' (Davis, 2004; 141) whilst others, including the Canadian critic A.D. Paterson and the Scottish critic William Sharp, felt the blueish tints produced a corpse-like pallor (Sidlauskas, 2001; 23). Although, these texts did not discuss racial whiteness by comparing the painting to black subjective alterity, the commentary implied that those white, male viewers had demanded a life-affirming 'normal', feminine whiteness, which they could symbolically consume as the commodity Beauty. But instead, what they perceived to be 'flaws' in Sargent's representation of white skin had disrupted their racially desiring male gaze.

Then, in the late-20th and early-21st centuries, renewed interest in Sargent seemed to have stimulated what I observed as a new wave of unreflexive art historical and curatorial praise of a normalizing ideal whiteness in the Gautreau paintings. Conforming to this observation, in 1998 Elaine Kilmurray had praised Mme Gautreau (through Sargent's paintings) as possessing a 'pallid classicism and icily erotic beauty'—in which the terms 'icily', 'classicism' and 'pallid' all seemed to function as metaphors for the whiteness of her 'erotic beauty'[40](Kilmurray, 1998; 101).

Similarly, I noticed that the Metropolitan Museum's educator Joseph Loh had developed the theme in an online video, in which he had eulogised *Madame X* as a representation of the 'Ideal woman' because of her 'white, alabaster skin' (Loh, undated). Furthermore, in the *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, the conservators Dorothy Mahon and Silvia Centeno praised *Madame X*'s 'exquisitely pale flesh tone' (Mahon, 2005; 126). Meanwhile, Gautreau's biographer Davis, whilst only fleetingly registering that Mme Gautreau's existence had depended upon the subjugation of black people under white-supremacy in Louisiana, could not overstate her repeated praise for the beauty of Mme Gautreau's whiteness, both in person and also in Sargent's representation of her:

> *…a* ***swan****… soft* ***white*** *shoulders… a Greek statue… her* ***pure white*** *skin looked more like* ***marble****… a* ***classical*** *ideal of beauty…* ***milky*** *perfection… superior,* ***pearly*** *countenance… [etc, etc] [my emphasis] (Davis, 2003; 35, 52, 54)*

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40. It was obvious that Kilmurray's terms 'pallid' and 'icily' were, respectively, synonym and metaphor for whiteness (with ice, despite its intrinsic transparency, being often perceived as white—as in 'white snow'). However, I also think that writers use the term 'classical' as a visual metaphor for the white marble and limestone sculpture and architecture which, although they might have been originally coloured by paint, are the sun-bleached, archaeological remains of classical Greek and Roman antiquity.

Because their (perhaps somewhat naïve) investment in white racial beauty was so apparent, it was no surprise that such texts did not, to use Martin Berger's phrase, 'see race as an issue' (2005). However, what I also noticed was that even when some Sargent/Gautreau scholars attempted to pay specific, critical attention to 'whiteness' and the politics of skin colour, they sometimes developed a blind spot when it came to the racial implications of their own discourse.

One example of this lacunae occurred in a text by the art historian Susan Sidlauskas, which seemed to epitomise what Toni Morrison had critiqued as 'silence and evasion' on questions of race. In 2001, Sidlauskas published an article called *Painting Skin: John Singer Sargent's "Madame X"* in the prestigious journal *American Art*—supposedly in order to better 'understand the social and cultural circumstances' of the painting. Yet, in the course of her learned, 25-page treatise she seemed to have completely avoided the work of contextualising the historical discourse of whiteness within the racialized discourse of the French and American empires, even though public concerns about skin complexion seemed to have been inextricably bound up with hegemonic anxieties about white, racial fitness and purity (Babb, 1997; 76). Finally, I noted that as recently as 2014, when the American scholar Liz Renes published her abstract for a paper about whiteness and *Madame X*, she reasserted the hegemonic, art-historical tradition of omitting all reference to the racial implications of a 'whiteness' discourse—instead, linking Sargent's painting of whiteness exclusively with his inferred homosexual desire (Renes, 2004).

However, during my critical readings into the Gautreau portraits, I also discovered that the American feminist biographer-turned-novelist Gioia Diliberto had, like myself, attempted to critically 'unmask' the racial implications of Sargent's portraits of Mme Gautreau in her novel, *I Am Madame X* (2003). In a dramatic narrative, Diliberto linked Mme Gautreau's purported obsession with whiteness to her historical upbringing and specifically to her white-supremacist Deep South clan. However, Diliberto's work was heavily fictionalized, inventing, as her pivotal sub-plot, the device of an African-American character who 'passes for white'—which was reminiscent of Fannie Hurst's 1933 novel, *Imitation of Life* and its film adaptations.

Although Diliberto's critical unmasking of Africana in relation to Sargent's Gautreau paintings was successful in dramatic terms, I wasn't sure it had been entirely strengthened by that fictional device—given that the novel did not address the racial discourse which was available through documented historical characters such as James Conner, Charles Parlange and also—from Sargent himself, whose well-documented racial attitudes Diliberto omitted.

With all that I had learnt about the elisions implicit in what Babb had termed the 'ideology of

whiteness', I realised that, if my unmasking methods were to facilitate criticality, then I would need to pay greater attention to Sargent's own racial attitudes, which, even before I had started my project had become normalized for me through his 'Orientalist' paintings. My readings made it clear that, as Stephenson had pointed out, the painter's interest in ethnography and race had been commented upon during his life, particularly by the English art critic Alice Meynell who, in her 1903 book about the artist, claimed that he had 'a keen sight for the sign of the races' (Meynell IN Stephenson, 2005).

Stephenson had been building upon theories by Kathleen Adler, et al, put forward in 1999, about Sargent's complex relationship with 'white' Anglo-Jewish patrons. Consequently, he focused on the changing notions of racial whiteness—with less emphasis on 'theorizations of [Africana] otherness and alterity' (2005). This, meant that, although Stephenson mentioned the context of British and American imperialism, he only addressed in passing how Sargent's interest in white racial signification was contextualized by the artist's long-term interest in painting African and African-American models. By way of contrast, my '*Yaa Asantewaa…*' paintings achieved part of their work by appropriating motifs from the 'ideologically white' *Study of Mme Gautreau*, and translating them through my portrait of a black woman and about a black historical figure. And, as I outline below, my transracial metamorphosis not only addressed Sargent's interest in whiteness, but also his interest in Africana as racialized blackness, and his well-documented masking of Africana through the representation of racial whiteness.

Fig. 8.7: Sargent, J.S., 'Atlas and the Hesperides'. c.1922–25. Oil paint on canvas, Diameter 3048mm. Photo courtesy of Boston Museum of Fine Art.

Later in his career, as he concentrated on other genres including history painting, Sargent won prestigious commissions including a series of murals for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts

(MFA). The MFA murals occupied him for nine years, from 1916—when he received the commission, until 1925—shortly before his death. They illustrated mythological themes from Romano-Hellenic antiquity, and he worked on preparatory studies and the paintings (which were installed on panels) in his London and Boston studios. Sargent's 'loyal assistant in technical matters' (Volk IN Ormond, 1998; 177) was a Boston architect, Thomas A. Fox (1864–1946), who played a role in organising the deceased artist's American estate, and who also wrote a eulogy in a local paper, the *Boston Evening Transcript*. According to Fox, when Sargent made the MFA murals:

> *a young, coloured man… served as the model for practically all the male figures, and indeed for some of the others [the female figures]. (Fox IN Fairbrother, 2000; 176)*

In her 1999 book about the murals, published by the MFA, Dr Carol Troyen, an MFA curator, confirmed that Sargent's 'favourite' model was the African-American Thomas E. McKeller (1892–1962) (Troyen, 1999). Fairbrother, adding detail about Sargent's methodology, noted that:

> *In [the mural] Atlas and the Hesperides… [see Fig 8.7, above] Sargent edited and adjusted the body of the African-American [McKeller] to create an* ***uncontroversial*** *image of the mythological Titan. (Fairbrother, 2000; 176) [my emphasis]*

In his 2000 text, Fairbrother had not clarified what he meant by 'uncontroversial', and writing in 1994 he had alluded only to the 'complexity of racial issues in the United States'—a phrase which I thought to be evasive. However, it seemed reasonable to infer that Fairbrother was referring to the fact that Boston, despite its reputation as a bastion of American liberalism, also had high levels of racial segregation imposed by racist, white, residents against African Americans—as detailed by the Princeton sociologist Douglas Massey (1993; 22).

The film historian Melvyn Stokes observed that such social divisions were strongly evident in the arts, when Boston became a site of conflict over *The Clansman* (or *Birth of a Nation),* W.D. Griffith's overtly racist, 1915 film celebrating Ku-Klux-Klan, white-supremacist terrorism (Stokes, 2007; 145). Indeed, Sargent had been the target of protest by some Boston Jews for what they considered to be his anti-semitic representation of Judaism in his murals for the Boston Library (Fairbrother, 1986; 272). Fairbrother's writing about McKeller seemed to suggest (albeit hesitantly) that Sargent was complying with white-supremacist prejudices by demonstrating his reluctance to represent 'Atlas' as too overtly 'African'. Such reluctance might have been reinforced by his representation of McKeller's naked body in a scene in which he was surrounded by naked, young, blonde women (see fig. 8.7, above).

I was bemused that Sargent had negotiated the same field of Afro-Hellenic discourse

addressed in my painting *The Rescue of Andromeda*—because Atlas was a key figure in the Africana discourse of the Perseus myth. I recalled that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2004; 162), the Titan known as Atlas seemed to have dwelt in the region we now know as Africa, and when Perseus turned him into stone, he became the Atlas mountain range (in present day, Morocco) (Dueck, 2012; 26)—which was itself represented in my *Andromeda* painting.

Did Sargent, by painting an African-American man to represent a mythological, Africana figure, intend to subvert, subtly, white prejudices about not only classical antiquity, but also the 'ideal' of beauty? After all, transracial masquerade was a major theme of American arts, with blacked-up 'villains' in Griffith's *The Clansman* played by white men... Or, was it more accurate to interpret Sargent's transracial method as a double masking of fugitive Africana identities—that, by representing McKeller and Atlas both as 'white' he was merely colluding in the endemic, U.S., white, political culture of segregation and black disenfranchisement?

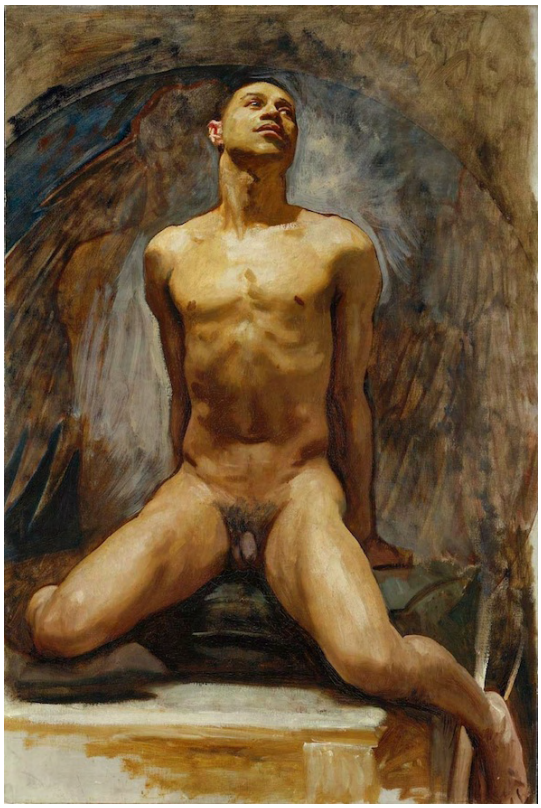

Fig. 8.8: Sargent, JS., 'Nude Study of Thomas E McKeller', c.1922–25. Oil paint on canvas, 1257 mm x 844mm

As I learnt more about Sargent's activity in this latter period of his career, I wondered if the answer to the riddle of his transracial methodology could be found in the spectacle and discourse of another painting? For, as well as his preparatory sketches, Sargent also created one of his most compelling and also, disturbing, large-scale oil paintings with the same model: the *Nude Study of Thomas E McKeller* (1917–20) (Fig. 8.8, above). The painting's troubled

history was analysed in detail by the writer Douglas Shand-Tucci (2013): After having been noticed as a 'private' work by visitors to Sargent's Boston studio, *Nude Study* led an increasingly fugitive existence after his death. According to both Shand-Tucci and Fairbrother, it was more-or-less 'suppressed' until after it's purchase by the MFA in 1986 (although it was reproduced in Mount's 1955 Sargent biography). As with other aspects of his life, Sargent's motives for this image seemed ambiguous.

There was, to my knowledge, only one documented account of Sargent's spoken attitudes towards his numerous African-American models (as distinct from remarks about African-Magreb models), and it seemed to mitigate against a philanthropic or disinterested reading. In 1916, whilst in Boston working on the Boston Library murals, he was asked by his friend, the violinist and poet Leonora Speyer (1872–1956) whether he was working on any new portraits? To which, Sargent replied, 'no, I'm only painting mountains and niggers' (Mount, 1955; 277). The 'mountains' were a reference to his trip to Montana, Canada and the Rockies in July, where he made landscape sketches (Ormond, 1998; 277); the 'niggers' referred not only to his preparatory drawings for the murals, but also to forthcoming works such as his watercolour sketch *The Bathers* (1917), which depicted a group of naked African-American men on a Florida beach. And yet, unlike Mme Gautreau's clan, Sargent's father Fitzwilliam (1820–1889) had been a public opponent of racism and the Confederacy, publishing a polemical book in Philadelphia during the Civil War, stating:

> *Every fact shows that the [free] negro has participated in, and progressed with, the general advancement of society in the Free States. This must necessarily continue more unrestrictedly than before the war. (Sargent, F., 1864; 137)*

So, why would his son later voice such crude white supremacism? Or, did the artist intend his epithets to be understood as ironic? There seemed to have been contradictions in his attitudes to race: so, despite his 'homage' to Mme Gautreau's whiteness, he had in 1880 written to his friend Ben Castillo about the 'magnificent Arabs' of North Africa (Ormond, 1998). Much later, when corresponding in 1908 to an old friend—Miss Popert—about his failure to visit her in Rome, Sargent had declared that:

> *My hatred of my fellow creatures extends to the entire race, or to* ***the entire white race*** *and when I escape from London to a foreign country, my principle object is to fly from the species. To call on a Caucasian when abroad is a thing I never do. I am not proud of this, but neither am I of a bald head… (Sargent, 1908 IN Mount, 1955; 273) [my emphasis]*

In this text, I could not read Sargent as expressing a literal, political enmity for all 'white' individuals: Miss Popert was herself white (his letter had apologized for not seeing her because she was 'a Caucasian'), and yet he had concluded with an earnest invitation that she

visit him in London. Rather, I regarded this self-contradictory statement of simultaneous 'hatred' and hospitality as possible evidence of the artist's ironic self-awareness of the spectacular notability of his own transversing of racial boundaries in a world where, across the various white-supremacist empires, systems of segregation and racial hierarchy were becoming both normalized—and also contested.

However, although an excuse of 'irony' for Sargent disparaging his models as 'niggers' might have seemed plausible, what was I to make of his unmistakably literal, written use of the racist insult in other contexts? In 1895, he had written to his friend, Mrs J. Montgomery Sears of Boston, complaining that he had been asked to contrive a picturesque backdrop to a portrait. What annoyed Sargent was that the 'venerable place' he had been asked to paint was in reality still a building site, or as he put it: 'scaffoldings covered with niggers' (Sargent IN Olson, 1986; 193). There appeared to be no semblance of irony in this remark, merely apparent contempt for the black construction workers at the Vanderbilt mansion—in contrast to his father, who had used the term twice in his book to describe the ironic, self-depreciation of oppressed Africans (Sargent, F, 1864; 134).

Then, also in 1916, Sargent had written to his friend (and later his first major biographer) Sir Evan Charteris (1864–1940) about his work to finish the ceiling of the Boston Public Library —another long-standing, prestigious commission. Complaining about his exertions, Sargent had written '…I have to work like a nigger at modelling things that the workmen carry off and cast' (Sargent, 1916 IN Charteris, 1927). Sargent was undoubtedly making a direct association between social inferiority and African-Americans, because the aphorism 'work like a nigger' had, according to the historian of whiteness David Roediger, emerged into American-English in the 1830s as a symbolic rejection of 'hard drudging work' that was close in effort to plantation slavery (1999; 68).

Clearly, his work in the United States meant that those whom he termed 'niggers', (meaning contemptible African-Americans?), had weighed upon Sargent's mind in an insistent manner. His 1916 outbursts occurred soon after Mme Gautreau had died—with her adopted homeland riven by a war more awful than that which had slain her father. *Madame X* was again on tour and was delivered to New York for installation in the Metropolitan Museum as the 'best thing' the painter believed he had done. Yet, in his almost simultaneous, written claim to have been 'working like a nigger' I also speculated whether, for Sargent also, the two phenomena—enslaved Africans and Mme Gautreau's signifying whiteness—were not entirely unconnected.

Whatever the case, I thought that Sargent, in his writing and in his speech, had demonstrated definite contempt for African-Americans. Whether this contempt continued unchanged until

and even beyond the painting of the *Nude Study of Thomas E McKeller*, remained uncertain. Trevor Fairbrother claimed that Sargent's attitude towards McKeller was benign and, writing in 1994, he described the *Nude Study* as a 'tender' informal portrait of a person in whom 'Sargent saw beauty' (1994; 142). Certainly, Thomas Fox recalled that the day after the artist's death, McKeller had visited Sargent's Boston studio to 'pay his respects', which suggested that Fox wanted to portray the relationship as respectable. Fairbrother also noted that the painting could be subject to numerous readings, 'including innocent openness, sexual invitation, vulnerability, or subjugation', (1994; p142).

My observation about Sargent's so-called 'nigger' paintings was that he rarely (if ever) painted black men clothed, and showed little interest in African-American women—unlike his portraits of white people, African-Arab people and East Asian women. His major McKeller portrait represented his African-American model as naked, frontally exposed, and on his knees, looking upwards, away from the viewer, with his strained, supporting arms appearing constrained to his sides (and, with some overpainted, dark wings in the background). I understood that Sargent painted the image with great naturalistic skill, and that his relationship with McKeller was probably one of an employer and employee. Nevertheless, I could not find any supporting evidence that he discussed African Americans as anything other than 'niggers'—whom he used primarily in order to eulogise white, Romano-Hellenic motifs. I thought it likely that, at the very least, he was aware of white-supremacist views, although it was not always possible to determine with total certainty his motives for using racist terms.

8.6 Summarising critical reading of whiteness in *Study of Mme Gautreau*

My critical readings revealed that Sargent had written about the exaggerated whiteness of Mme Gautreau as producing 'great beauty', which he tried to represent, and that the 'Southern Belle' herself evinced a conspicuous interest in an idealized whiteness, which she tried to model and which thereby constituted a condition of existence for the artwork. In the context of the artistic practices identified by Babb (1998), Rosenthal (2004), Stephenson (2005) et al, this ideological whiteness seemed to function as a specific 'negation' of black, Africana identity, and thus constituted a racially inverted form of 'Africana'. In the intervening years, much comment had been made about whiteness in his Gautreau portrait, but most of it considered, unreflexively, the successes, or failures, of Sargent's representation of an idealized, white, beauty. Only Diliberto and Stephenson critiqued the racial implications of the painting's iconography, although Diliberto, unlike Stephenson, also linked this to the clear relationship of socio-economic exploitation that the sitter had to African people. Although, I discovered the 'nigger' references in the texts of leading, Sargent art historians, none had ever paid any significant attention to the painter's verbalised and written contempt for African-Americans

(whom, apparently, he only ever discussed contemptuously). This historiographical neglect indicated those white, art historians' own implicit biases. And no art historical text I read linked Sargent's documented racism with his explicit homage to the beauty of Mme Gautreau's whiteness—which, he would have known to have been the pride of a former slaveholding family with strong ties to the white-supremacist Confederacy. The *Study of Mme Gautreau* then, not only masked Africana by its refusal to present motifs symbolising the sitter's dependence on subjugated African labour, but also by its much-remarked upon, aestheticized invocation of racial whiteness within the context of that history. This final element of my critical reading of and about the *Study of Mme Gautreau*, demonstrated that my choice in selecting the painting as an example of masked Africana, made sense not only because of its complex iconology, but also because my practice, through the *Yaa Asantewaa* painting, directly addressed and 'détourned' the painter's wider history of quite literally 'masking' the Africana identity of at least one of his key models—whom Sargent apparently regarded as racially contemptible.

8.7 Reflecting on how my *Yaa Asantewaa* paintings facilitated critical practice

My discursive and spectacular journey through the visionary mind of Sargent, of his models and of their interlocutors in the fields of art history and biography had been prompted by my attempt to unmask 'Africana' rendered fugitive from visibility by the painter's representation of Mme Gautreau. My critical practice, including my reading methodology, had resulted in new works, which appropriated the posture and dress code of Sargent's white, slave-plantation heiress into my own representations of a black noblewoman who resisted British imperialism. However, although I thought that neither of my new works, *Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the Dispositions at Ejisu*, fully articulated a critical unmasking of Africana in the *Study of Mme Gautreau* because of their over-complex iconography, I did think that the process, which had produced my painting, did correspond to my research aim—that it facilitate critical practice.

Consequently, I decided to plan new artworks devoted to reimagining the African children, men and women who had performed their unrewarded, unremarked-upon labours for the Ternant/Parlange/Avegno/Gautreau clan in Louisiana. Although not yet realised, I intended these proposed works to link the *Study of Mme Gautreau* with the lives of people like James Conner, the escaped, enslaved overseer. Perhaps, they would also address other, documented, African-American, Parlange individuals and their descendants—such as the California blogger, Patricia Bayonne-Johnson, who consented to discuss her Parlange ancestry with me. Having discovered that the man who had propagated Mme Gautreau's image as an icon of ideological whiteness, also held his African American models in contempt, I thought that this new realisation too, would empower me to produce work that critically unmasked Sargent's complex network of artistic gestures.

CHAPTER 9: MAKING 'MARIA FIRMINA DOS REIS READS TO HENRY TATE…'

Fig. 9.1: Donkor, K., 'Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate: Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza confer'. 2014, oil paints on canvas, 100 x 80cm.

Introduction

This chapter documents my use of the unmasking Africana methodology to make art which appropriates imagery from a bronze portrait bust of the founder of the Tate Gallery, Sir Henry Tate (1819–1899). The bust, which is part of the British collection, was made in 1897 by Sir Thomas Brock K.C.B., R.A. (1847–1922) and is titled *Sir Henry Tate* (see fig 9.3, below).

My oil painting, illustrated in Fig. 9.1, was titled *Maria Firmina dos Reis Reads to Henry Tate: Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza Confer* (Donkor, 2014)[41] and it was one of the later works I completed for this research project.

Further developing an iconographic mode that I had also used for some of the earlier works in this research project, I created a group of naturalistic figures gathered beneath an open sky and located towards the foreground of an expansive, landscape vista that appeared to recede behind them to a distant, undulating horizon. Because of the relatively large number of motifs, their relationships within the composition, and the diversity of thematic source materials, it was one of the most complex of my Africana Unmasked artworks. In part, this iconographic complexity literally embodied the work's development, particularly in the critical reading phase.

Each of the five people named in my title were historical figures who I intended to represent through my painting. However, only two of my figures—the British capitalist Sir Henry Tate (1819–1899) and the Brazilian Princess Regent Isabel Braganza (1846–1921)—were created by the appropriation of pre-existing, documentary portraits. My other three historical figures were each based on photographs and paintings of a different individual, but each one emphasized elements of the historical person's biography: the black British artist Donald Rodney; the abolitionist Brazilian lawyer and poet Louis Gama (1830–1882) and the abolitionist Brazilian novelist Maria Firmina dos Reis (1825–1917).

My Henry Tate figure was a synthetic creation that merged my appropriation of Brock's documentary, masking portrait with my own study of a nude figure. My land and skyscape were also highly synthetic, bringing together images based upon a number of photographic studies that I had made at geographically disparate sites, and which I had then merged into the appearance of a topographically consistent whole. The entire painting then, produced a fictional, imaginary scene—but a scene that brought together realistically rendered, iconic motifs, all of which were based upon historically documented people, objects and places.

The mood of the figures was quite sombre—none of them appeared to be smiling, and the cloudy sky and mountainous terrain seemed to add to the atmosphere. Nevertheless, the chromatically vivid and varied palette was intended to impart a countervailing sense of good cheer, and this notion of psychological ambiguity was perhaps heightened by the incongruous presence of a nude figure in the presence of the other, fully dressed figures.

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41. For brevity and to avoid undue repetition, I shall not always refer to this work by its full title, but will, on occasion abbreviate to *Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate.*

In the immediate foreground I painted a wooden crate inscribed with the text 'CANE SUG HENR TATE & LIV', alongside a logo based on the imperial Brazilian flag. This text, along with the landscape and figures were intended to create an image that, considered as a whole, alluded to the historical exploitation, emancipation and memorialisation of African people enslaved in the trans-Atlantic sugar industry—and, in particular, what I had adjudged to be the probable derivation of Henry Tate's sugar fortune (and therefore of Brock's sculpture, too) from such enslavement.

In Chapter 9, I begin by explaining the process of creating this artwork, why I designed and selected its various motifs, and how I arranged them within a series of developing compositions intended to explore the historical relationships between the figures and places which the motifs represented. Then, in Chapter 10, I also explain how my 'reading fugitive Africana' methodology explored the ways in which the portrait bust might constitute one, masking element of the Africana functions in Brock's work. In doing so, I also set out how the portrait *Sir Henry Tate* had been hitherto contextualised by a pattern of corporate 'masking' statements that tended to evade, obscure, minimise or deny the actual Sir Henry Tate's probable exploitation of Africana slave-labour produce. I also consider how other artists and commentators, particularly Eddie Chambers, Keith Piper and Donald Rodney, had worked with the claim that Sir Henry's fortune was founded on profits derived from the exploitation of enslaved, or else, colonial labour.

9.1 Chronological development of compositions to unmask Brock's 'Sir Henry Tate'

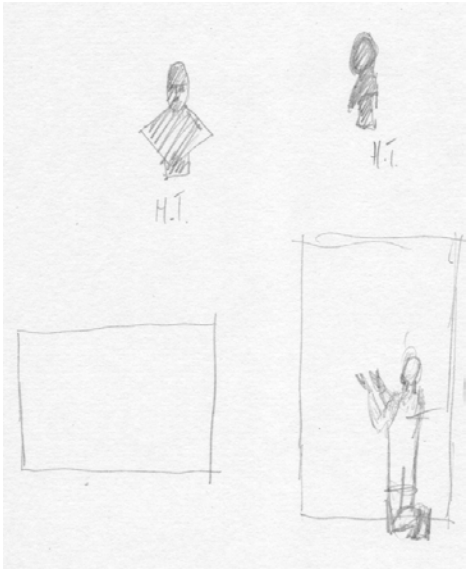


Fig. 9.2: 'Study for unmasking Brock's Sir Henry Tate' by Donkor, K., 2014, pencil on paper.

As well as accomplishing my 'critical reading' of Brock's *Sir Henry Tate* (1897) (which I shall return to in Chapter 10) I also worked on the observation and the appropriation/synthesizing

phases. My critical observations began with my photographing and making sketches of the Brock sculpture (Fig. 9.2, above).

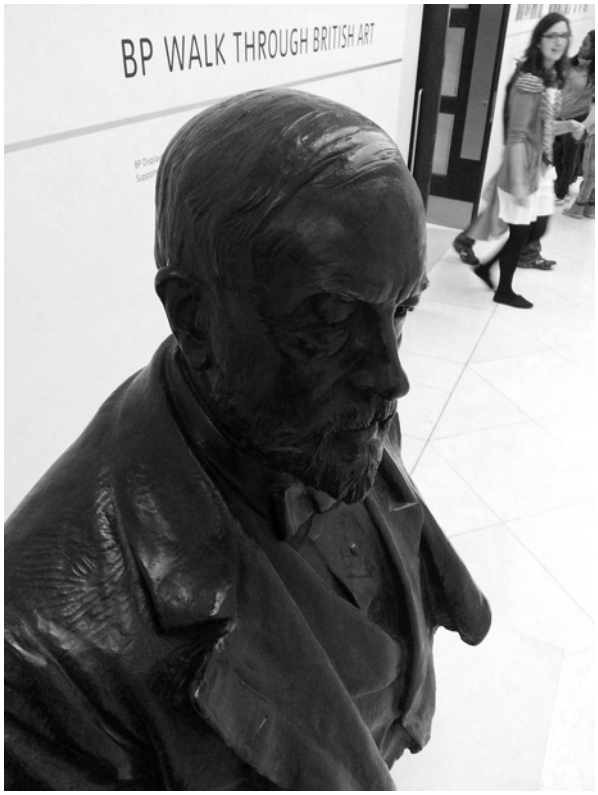


Fig. 9.3: Brock, H., 'Sir Henry Tate'. 1897, bronze on stone base. Photo Donkor, K., 2013.

Fig. 9.3 (above) is one my critical observation photographs of Sir Thomas Brock R.A's *Sir Henry Tate*. It was a bronze, life-sized bust on a stone base and, at the time of writing, it was on what appeared to be permanent display at Tate Britain—in the corridor at the top of the main staircase leading from the Manton entrance to the Duveen Galleries.

The two small sketches of a bust at the top of Fig. 9.2 (above) show my initial drawings, with just the basic, iconic form and outline, and the dark tonal value of the sculpture retained. I began, immediately, to experiment with the possibility of attaching an appropriated likeness of the *Henry Tate* bust onto a full human figure. This would allow for a greater range of expressive possibilities by using the gestures, costume, context and postures of an entire body, rather than the more limited range obtainable by using only a bust.

The three-dimensionality of Brock's bust, and its accessible position in the gallery (as well as of its copies in Brixton and Streatham) meant it could be observed from many angles. This, in turn, meant it was possible to appropriate a resemblance to the*Sir Henry* portrait by, for example, looking at it from slightly below, or slightly above. Consequently, the ability to appropriate Brock's *Sir Henry* portrait accurately from a viewpoint located slightly behind the bust, gave me the possibility to represent it as though it was facing away from the viewer and

fixing its sculpted gaze towards some element 'within' the illusory three-dimensional space of the picture. In this sense, I was appropriating, not simply *Sir Henry*'s likeness, but also the direction of its gaze, which I could 'redirect' to any object of my making.

The drawing to the bottom right of Fig. 9.2 (above) embodied this 'facing' of the figure back into the pictorial space. A kneeling figure (Tate) had his back towards the viewer, with his hands raised in a gesture towards the rectangular element. Thus, my first productive experiment was to abstract the appropriated *Sir Henry* head from its 'bust' motif by synthetically attaching it to the kneeling figure. I selected the posture of a kneeling figure because of the notion, gained from critical reading, that Henry Tate might have been secretly guilty about what I suspected was his furtive exploitation of Afro-Brazilian slave labour.

In some historical western and African iconographies, a kneeling figure represented humility, particularly before God, but also before other people. The ideal Christian (and Henry Tate was the son of a Unitarian preacher, buried in a Christian mausoleum) physically demonstrated their sense of humble repentance by kneeling. Accordingly, at first, I thought that a kneeling 'Tate' could be interpreted as representing a figure in humble recognition of his own wrongdoing. However, as there was nothing in Tate's biography documenting expressions of empathy or remorse towards the African slave labourers who, quite probably, (in my opinion) produced his raw cane sugar, I decided it would be inappropriate to give his figure a humble, kneeling stance.

Fig. 9.4: Donkor, K., 'Study for Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate'. 2014, pencil on paper.

Although, a kneeling stance might have lacked psychological credibility for a critical

appropriation of Tate's portrait, I decided to experiment by placing the Brock sculpture into a visual relationship with other figures drawn from the history of New-World, plantation slavery —figures which, because of ideas represented by their biographies, might add a more critical element within my overall composition.

Thus, starting from my proposition that Tate's Liverpool refinery probably used industrial quantities of African-slave-produced, Brazilian raw cane-sugar, I looked for historical Afro-Brazilian figures prominent in the field of abolitionism. Fig. 9.4 (above) shows my first experiment in which a Henry Tate figure was placed within a picture frame, alongside rudimentary representations of Donald Rodney, Luís Gama and Harriet Tubman (1822–1913). To the right, the Tate figure reclined on the ground next to a sugar cane field, separated from the other three figures by a body of water. On the horizon, was the outline of a sailing ship, symbolic of an Atlantic trading empire. Tate gestured towards the other three, one of whom was gesturing towards him.

The key Afro-Brazilian whom I first sought to represent was Luís Gama, who in 1830 was born in Bahia (the north-eastern, sugar-producing region of Brazil) to a freed African woman and a white Portuguese nobleman. In the course of my critical reading methodology, I discovered a fairly detailed, authoritative biography of Gama in the 2006 book *From Slavery to Freedom in Brazil: Bahia, 1835–1900,* written by the American specialist in Latin American history, Dale Graden. According to Graden, Luís Gama, aged 10, was illegally sold into slavery by his father in order to pay off a gambling debt (2006; 73).

In fact, Gama's biography gave the lie to inaccurate claims (produced by the Tate Gallery and Tate legacy corporations, which I detail in Chapter 10) that the Atlantic slave trade ended in 1807. This was because, in 1840, Gama was trafficked through the Atlantic from Bahia to Rio de Janeiro aboard the slave ship *Saraiva.* After escaping from bondage in 1848, he went on to become a São Paulo lawyer and leading anti-slavery militant. However, what also made his memory suited to my composition was his volume of poetry, *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas* (1859), in which he satirised the hypocritical pretensions of the Brazilian aristocracy, lambasting their denial of any African ancestry (Graden, 2006; 74). Therefore, I decided that a representation of Gama in my work would invoke an ironic critique of Brock's *Sir Henry Tate*, because I believed that the bust had become enmeshed in, and so embodied, the corporate denial of the role of enslaved Africans in the production of Tate's fortune, as I have outlined in Chapter 10.

However, proceeding with a composition representing just those two, named, historical figures —Tate and Gama—would have led to a particular set of problematics that I wanted to avoid. In my 2014 conversation with the British artist Keith Piper, he noted that one question at

stake in both the title and iconography of his mixed media work *The Seven Rages of Man* (1985) was its highly gendered content, leading him, in hindsight, to disavow the implication that black oppression and liberation were exclusively male concerns (Piper, 2014).

Indeed, this masculinist framing of political resistance in his art was implicit in the text which Piper had also cited to me as inspirational—the African-American writer Addison Gayle's anthology of essays, *The Black Aesthetic* (1971). In the frontispiece, there was a quotation from the poet Margaret Walker (1915–1998) which stated: "Let the martial songs be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of *men* now rise and take control" [my emphasis]. In my unmasking work, I wanted to take account of the social process which the American Critical-Race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (b. 1959) had termed 'intersectionality' (1991).

> *The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group difference. (Crenshaw, 1991).*

My intention of creating an artwork celebrating African-American abolitionists, that recognised 'intra-group' differences, would necessitate picturing female as well as male figures. Therefore, my initial intention was that a figure representing Harriet Tubman would be a central element of the composition. My readings into the biography of Harriet Tubman had been extensive, due to my prior creation of other artworks, as well as writing my MA dissertation about her. Amongst the most authoritative accounts of her life was the historian Kate Larson's *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (2003).

Like Gama, Tubman was an escaped slave-labourer and prominent anti-slavery activist during Henry Tate's lifetime. Whereas, in 1863, Tate was, in my view, quite probably profiteering from slave-labour produce in Liverpool, Tubman, on the other hand, had became 'the first woman to plan and execute an armed expedition during the Civil War' (Larson, 2003, 212) when she helped lead the Combahee Ferry Raid to liberate hundreds of people and burn (or requisition) slave-produced goods. Thus, I initially thought that representations of Tubman and Gama together in a single composition would serve to unmask the intersectional nature of the Americas' plantation systems, enslaving women and men alike, domestic as well as agricultural and industrial workers.

In addition, my concept for creating a work that unmasked Brock's *Sir Henry Tate* was to also represent a critical, Africana figure with a British connection to Tate—one who could draw attention to the industrialist's historic role as a British art collector and philanthropist. The figure whom I considered a pre-eminent symbol was Donald Rodney, the black British artist who had proposed a Millbank museum sculpture made from sugar cubes in order to satirise

the economic foundations of the Tate gallery (Chambers, 2012; 179). That Rodney had even contemplated such a critique made him and Keith Piper (see Chapter 10) stand out amongst British artists, as they were the only, prominent, visual arts practitioners ever to have seriously questioned, the historical and ethical foundations of the Tate sugar fortune[42]. Given that, according to Chambers, (2012; 200) Rodney's oeuvre became exemplary of the Tate Gallery's developing policy of racial inclusiveness, with *In the house of my father* (Rodney, 1996) on display at the time of writing this thesis, I thought it a fitting irony that his critical spirit was invoked in my own 'unmasking' work.

42. I make this assertion on the basis that I have tried to find prominent artists who have questioned seriously the foundations of the Tate sugar fortune, but, in my readings on the subject to date, I have not encountered other examples. This must be because, either the assertions of the Tate legacy corporations are true and so nobody wishes to repeat what, in that case, would be the folly of Rodney et al in pursuing a false line of research; or it is because Henry Tate & Sons were so effective in masking their supply chain that even artists who might have been presumed to have had an interest in the field, (such as the politically engaged black British artist Maud Sulter, who was artist in residence at Tate Liverpool in 1991), have not found any compelling evidence to develop their work in that direction (Sulter, M., 1991). In Chapter 10, I set out in detail why I consider that it is the latter argument (masking strategies by Henry Tate) which is the more likely cause of the subject's fugitive status. However, the fact that the Tate Gallery is such a powerful institutional force in the artworld cannot be ruled out as a possible factor that might have led to a muting of artistic enthusiasm for this field of enquiry.

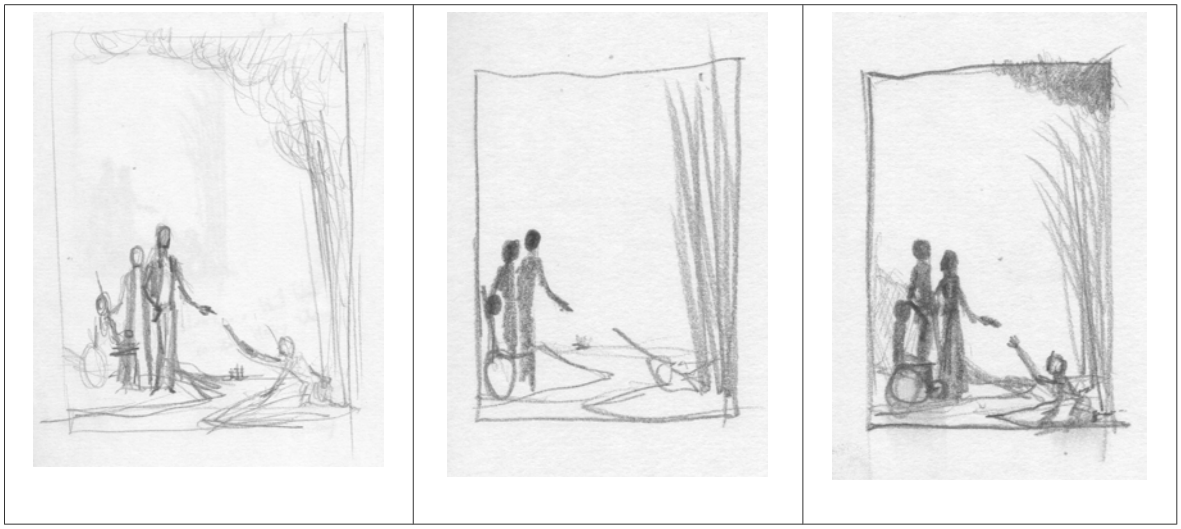


Fig. 9.5: Donkor, K., Three studies for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate', 2014, pencil on paper.

In the next three sketches, (fig. 9.5), I represented the cane field as burning, so that it might appear that Tate's gesture was an appeal for assistance. Although I found it difficult to imagine Henry Tate requesting genuinely public forgiveness for his exploitation of enslaved African people, I did think it more credible psychologically that, if in personal danger (from my imaginary burning cane field), perhaps vulnerable or distressed, he might be represented as requesting help—even from people he might otherwise have been content to exploit as slave labourers. In other words, I wanted the figures in my tableaux to function as though their postures were determined by recognisable, realistic, social codes of behaviour (such as 'fear') even though their context was imaginary.

In the rightmost image, there was, behind the three Africana figures, a mountainous landscape. This, given the conventions of single-point perspective, and when rendered in greater detail, had the visual effect of pushing the three figures towards the foreground, whilst simultaneously emphasising the enormity of the landscape. My intention was to invite viewers to picture the vast territories exploited by Victorian capitalists, such as Tate, to facilitate their international extraction of profit. This was based on my belief that distance itself, as envisaged in sublime artistic landscapes, functioned, in economic life, as a key mechanism of capitalism: because it was, in part, the consumer's distance from a desired product (such as sugar) which enabled merchants, (such as Henry Tate), to profit by controlling access.

Simultaneously, I wanted my portrayal of distance to evoke the vastness of the Atlantic, which, by preventing Africans from having access to their home communities, enabled slaveholders to exploit their social vulnerability—inflicting torturous labour regimes on generations of isolated plantation workers, as had been historicized by writers like C.L.R.

James, in his 1938 history of slave resistance on the island of Hispaniola, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (James, 2001). To emphasise this subliminal, symbolic power of the vista, the strong line of my horizon also acted as a kind of inner frame within the image, allowing the face and shoulders of the two upright figures to rise vertically above it, in silhouette against the sky.

Fig. 9.6: Donkor, K., 2014. Study for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate'. Pencil, coloured pencil and pastel on paper.

Fig. 9.6 documents the first colour treatment of my composition, with landscape continuing to play a role in my unmasking drama. The black smoke of a cane fire marked a strong visual imposition against the blue of the upper area of sky, whilst the body of water, which separated Tate from the other figures was a bloody red. On the horizon, ships were menaced by an enormous storm cloud, whilst, in the foreground, the figure of Tate was naked.

Within the western artistic tradition, nakedness, particularly in the presence of other, clothed figures could be, sometimes, symbolic of innocence and vulnerability. In biblical iconography, the innocence and vulnerability of Adam, Eve and Christ was often marked by nakedness—as depicted in works like Masaccio's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (1427) and Caravaggio's *The Flagellation of Christ* (1607). However, in the story of Adam and Eve, as told in *Genesis 2:21* (Bible, 2011; L162), nakedness was their state before their sinful fall. In my unmasking of *Sir Henry Tate*, the industrialist's prone posture and uplifted hand was intended to be evocative of

Michelangelo's *Adam* (1508–1512) in the Sistine Chapel—with Tate's nakedness in the 'garden of sugar cane' symbolising the problematics of shame and exposure that had brought censure upon his industry. Nevertheless, I also realised that my representation might signify in relation to erotically-charged precursors such as the seemingly phallocentric paintings, *The Pastoral Concert* by Titian (1509) and Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) as well as, perhaps, to the more comical, feminist détournement by Faith Ringgold in her *The Picnic at Giverny* (1991). That painting, which depicts 'a nude likeness of Picasso posing for a fictional black woman painter, Willia Marie Simone' (Farrington, 2005; 155) also represented a number of the artist's 'clothed women friends' meaning that, according to art historian Lisa E Farrington, it was 'as much a group portrait as it was a satire' (ibid). However, I was also mindful of Griselda Pollock's warning about subjects being:

> *disrobed to be painted in that condition which we call art—but which is just another site of power where your human identity can be diminished by the exposure of your vulnerable body to a costumed and protected gaze… (Pollock, 1999; 299)*

In my new colour study, (fig. 9.6) an increased level of figurative detail made it clear that the three Africana figures—symbolic of liberation—were conversing, with one gesturing towards Tate. However, for this work, I decided not to provide the viewer with the content of the envisaged conversation, either in the form of a caption, title, ancillary text, or sound. Perhaps, I reasoned, a more effective and direct method of critical unmasking would be to create a textual or audio element and place that into a compositional relationship with the appropriated Brock sculpture motif. For example, a commentary, dialogue, monologue, drama, poem, rap or song played in relation to an image appropriated from the bust. Nevertheless, my works remained mute, and it was for viewers to choose whether or not to imagine the figures 'in conversation' and, thereby, participate in constructing additional verbalised meaning for my unmasking artwork.

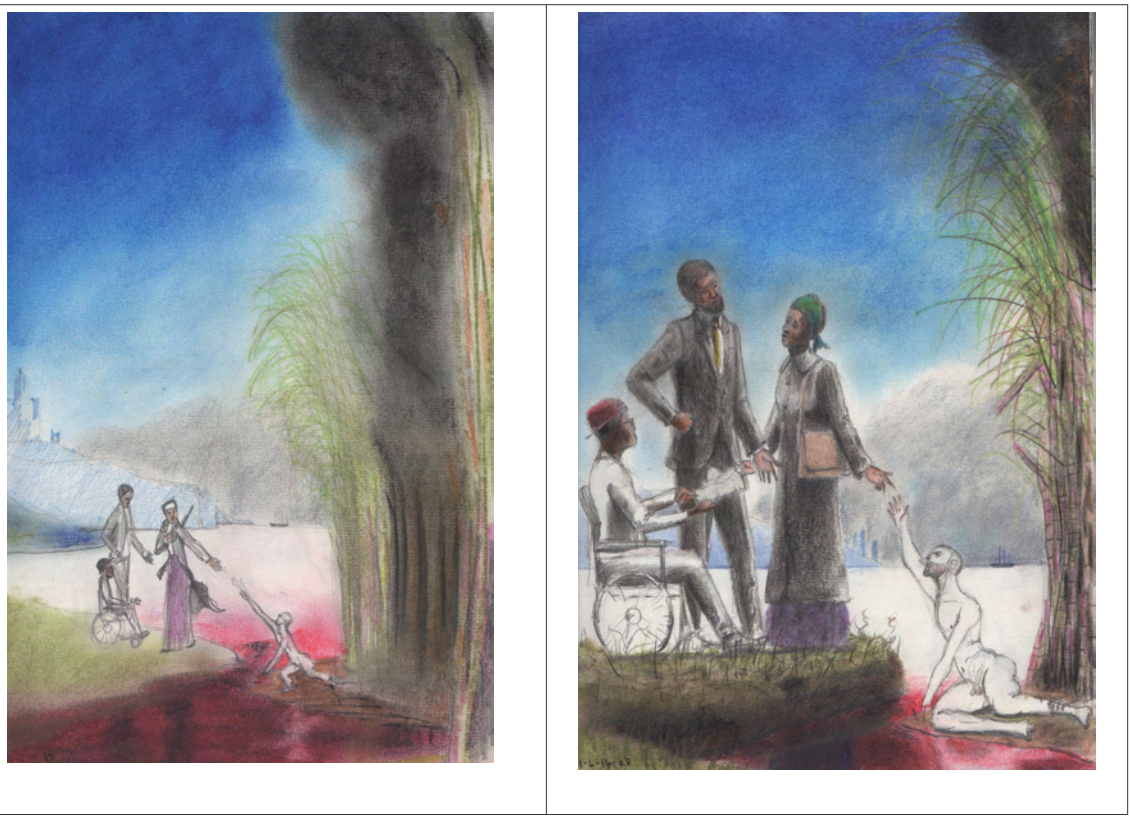


Fig. 9.7: Donkor, K., 2014. Two studies for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate'. Pencil, coloured pencil and pastel on paper.

Furthermore, in a context in which I intended to celebrate Africana strategies of liberation, mute artworks freed viewers to leave the work without feeling constrained to read or listen to a specific text. Constructions of verbalised or, textual meaning were not to be coerced by the soundscape of the artwork, but would be enticed—invited by its quietude.

In the subsequent two colour sketches (Fig. 9.7, above), I experimented further with the positioning of the viewer and horizon. In the image on the left, I withdrew the perspectival viewpoint back from the figures towards the viewer, so that the figures became reduced in scale, while the relatively larger area of landscape, and higher horizon seemed to engulf them amidst a sublime vista. Then, in the image to the right, the viewer was positioned closer to the figures, so that they take up a larger, more dominant area of the picture surface. The horizon was correspondingly lowered, so that the figures were silhouetted more clearly against sky and sea, thereby making the posture, gesture and costume more immediately legible, rather than if, had there been a higher horizon line, they had appeared to be less differentiated against the landscape's details.

Fig. 9.8: Donkor, K., 2014. 'Study for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate'. Pencil and coloured pencil on paper.

Finally, in Fig 9.8, the horizon was lowered even further, relative to the frame, but the figures were slightly receded back into the landscape again, covering a medium-sized area that was neither dominant, nor insignificant, as a proportion of the picture surface. Additionally, a crate, of the kind displayed in the Tate & Lyle archive in London, and which also featured in the theyarehere event, *Trailing Henry,* of 2011, (see Chapter 10) had been introduced into the immediate foreground.

Fig. 9.9: Donkor, K., 2014. Three sketches for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate'. Pencil on paper.

The three images in fig 9.9 were experimental sketches of a reclining Henry Tate figure. However, each has a different posture and gestures. None were drawn from life models or photographs, but were composed from my imaginative knowledge of perspective and anatomy—as I guided my pictorial intention through my hand and onto the support. In that sense, these works corresponded to a process, from early 2013 onwards, in which I decreased my figure drawing from life, digital 3D models and photographs in the early stages of compositions. Instead, I worked on drawings made directly from my imagined vision. Compared to my colour sketches (fig. 9.6; 9.7; 9.8), these later figures flexed their left knees, so that their genitalia were concealed and their nakedness was indicated by their buttocks. Additionally, the head angles were more in line with the spinal direction, which projected away from the viewer, deeper into the imaginary third dimension of the picture, so that, from our angle of view, we see the head as if from below the chin.

Fig. 9.10: Left: Donkor, K., 2014. 'Study of Brock's Sir Henry Tate', pencil on paper. Right: 'Donkor, K., 2014. Study of Brock's Sir Henry Tate and plinth at Tate'. Hand-drawn digital drawing.

Having formed an almost complete set of figures, vistas, postures and gestures with which to articulate the critical unmasking of Brock's *Sir Henry Tate* within a general composition, I returned to my critical observation of the Brock portrait for more detailed, recognisable elements to appropriate. During a visit to the museum, I crouched down at the base of the sculpture so that I could look up at the head of Henry Tate. This allowed me to appropriate the portrait from the same angle as though I were standing up and looking at a reclining figure, with the top of its head facing away from me—as envisaged in the sketches above.

Fig. 9.11: Donkor, K., 2014. 'Two studies of Brock's 'Sir Henry Tate', 2014. Hand-drawn digital drawings

I made several observations, firstly a rough sketch in pencil on paper (fig. 9.10), and then further drawings using a Samsung 'Ativ' tablet PC and its fine control digital pen (fig 9.11). Finally, I created a more prolonged and refined effort using Auto Sketchbook, which I then synthesized further by incorporating lifelike colours and a more detailed appropriation of the precise contours of the sculpted head, as seen from this particular point of view (fig. 9.11).

Fig. 9.12: Donkor, K., 2014. 'Study of Brock's Sir Henry Tate'. Hand-drawn digital painting.

One of the most startling things about this transformation to lifelike colour was the apparent change in mood, and even character, which appeared to have been produced. The genial, patrician man in Brock's portrait had become a sterner, less sympathetic character—more suited to the temperament of the tenacious founder of two of Britain's most longstanding institutions, joining the imperial nobility in the process (Tate was made a hereditary baronet in 1898). At this stage, I felt that I had found, in my reworking of Brock's lifelike portrait, the Henry I had been seeking.

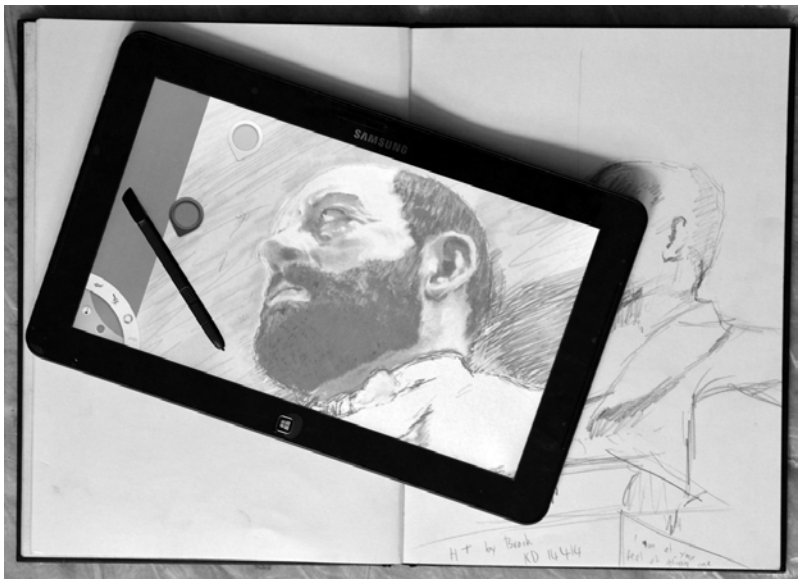


Fig. 9.12b: Donkor, K., 2014. Samsung 700T tablet PC with digital pen, along with paper sketchbook. Photograph.

The next task of the synthesizing phase was to situate my appropriation of the Tate portrait into a more detailed rendition of the other elements of the composition. The purpose of creating a composition with a similar level of detail to the portrait bust was to place the Tate figure in an imaginative space where it would function as an integral part of a credible, realistic whole. I thought that a good analogy for this was in spoken language. If I considered that the naturalistic realism of the Brock portrait constituted a language—that is, a mode of articulating Tate's physical body, then, in order to place that element in a readable composition with other figures, I chose to use the same language, or visual style. This allowed viewers to focus less on distinctions created by differences in the style of figures. Instead, figures could be imagined as interacting in the same mode of existence—as, metaphorically, 'equals', perhaps (by which, I meant that using a similar method of depiction could, perhaps, also be regarded as a metaphor for other forms of equality).

This tension between 'modes of articulation' (or visual styles, in the sense used by Arthur Danto in his 1964 essay, *The Artworld*) was demonstrated in my Chapter 4 work on

Andromeda. In my digital image of the drama, (see fig 6.10) my figures were all styled and physically modelled in a similar manner, a sort of full-colour painterly-realism. However, in the subsequent oil painting (see fig. 5.1), my image of the sculpture retained the artificial surface quality of Fehr's bronze by representing it's monochromatic patina. Conversely, the portrait in the foreground seemed more 'alive' by virtue of a polychromatic representation of the model's complexion, chair and clothing. In that work, even though both sets of figures had a similar, painterly, realism there was a 'grammatical' distinction between the style of the sculpture and the style of the portrait, which, even if a viewer was not explicitly aware of the distinction, created a dialogue between those modes of articulation.

9.2 Ethics and the aesthetic possibilities in the unmasking process

Although, the Tate Gallery imposed copyright restrictions on the uses of photographs of artworks within the gallery, visitors were free to make sketches. Provided the gallery artworks themselves were free of copyright restrictions, (as with Brock's portrait) then, I was free to use my sketched images without seeking permission (Tate, undated). However, my methodology stipulated that the unmasked element had to be recognisable as an appropriation of Brock's *Sir Henry Tate*. In the case of Sargent's *Study of Mme Gautreau* (1884), the pose was distinctive and well known—so, when my model adopted elements of Gautreau's pose with a similarly styled costume, the resulting painting made a plausible reference to Sargent's work. That form of recognisability—produced by the pose—was not as possible in relation to Brock's *Sir Henry Tate,* because his bust conformed to conventions in pose and expression that dated back to Bernini in the seventeenth century (such as his 1631 portrait of Scippione Borghese), and before that, into Roman antiquity. Simply to use the pose of a man in formal, 19th-century dress with his head cocked to one side, might not have been sufficient to establish the level of recognisability necessary for my unmasking methodology. So, in this instance, I had to ensure that from the angle of vision which I chose, an informed viewer (by which, I mean somebody familiar with *Sir Henry Tate*) could see that I had used Brock's work as my source. This required that I create a highly accurate drawing of Brock's portrait, which, I thought I achieved in my digital sketch (see fig. 9.12).

9.1 Rethinking my unmasking figures

Given that I had discovered the centrality of slave-produced, Brazilian sugar cane to the Liverpool refinery industry (see Chapter 10), I decided that, as I progressed with my unmasking experiments, it would be appropriate to put greater emphasis and focus on prominent women active in the history of Brazilian abolitionism, rather than the North American, Harriet Tubman. One of the new figures I decided to incorporate was intended to represent Maria Firmina dos Reis (1825–1917), the first, female Afro-Brazilian novelist. I

found detailed biographical information on her in the 2008 book *Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment: Toward a Legacy of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian Women Writers* by the American literary historian Dawn Duke.

According to Duke, Firmina dos Reis, unlike Tubman, was a freeborn Brazilian who was never enslaved. However, she was highly sympathetic to her compatriots held in bondage and was a committed abolitionist, as well as an educational philanthropist (Duke, 2008; 20). Diachronically speaking, a close contemporary of Henry Tate, her abolitionist book, *Ursula* documented the lives of enslaved Brazilians and was published in 1859, the year that Tate acquired his stake in the Liverpool sugar industry.

As with the other figures, there was an image in circulation purporting to be a portrait of Firmina dos Reis. However, it was, according to the anonymous Brazilian blog Vimarense (2011), a mis-labelled likeness of another Brazilian writer, Maria Benedita Bormann (1853–1895). The Bormann portrait had first appeared in the 1899, Brazilian book, *Mulheres illustres do Brazil*, by Ignez Sabino, which was republished in 1996. I could discover no other known, contemporaneous portrait of Firmina dos Reis from which to draw my own representation.

Fig. 9.15: Millais, J.E. 1874. 'The North-West Passage'. Oil paints on canvas. Presented to the National Collection of British Art by Henry Tate in 1894. Photograph courtesy of the Tate Gallery.

This confusion as to Firmina dos Reis' image, provided me with the opportunity to perform one of those acts of 'artistic license', which distinguished my imaginary artwork from work purporting to be entirely 'documentary': by détournementing a painting which Henry Tate had collected and donated to the nation, I could compose an unmasking encounter between my figure representing Dos Reis, and my representation of Brock's *Sir Henry Tate*.

The painting I selected for this task was *The Northwest Passage* (1874), by Sir John Everett Millais (1829–1896), in which a blonde, young woman is depicted reading whilst she sits next to an elderly, British sailor (see fig. 9.15). By altering the perceived racial identity of the woman in the painting, but simultaneously retaining the prominent placing of her book, and her mid-nineteenth century costume, I believed that I could effectively symbolise Dos Reis strategies of campaigning for emancipation through her own acts of reading and writing.

Furthermore, Millais painting did, itself, seem to address questions of trade and empire—because the 'Northwest Passage' of his title, as well as several other motifs in his image, referred to British expeditions attempting to conquer and control a potential new trade route from the Atlantic to the Pacific via the Arctic Ocean (Jayasena, 2013; 19). My interpretation of Millais' painting included the observation that his female figure appeared to be wearing a bright-blue, coral necklace—which might also be an allusion to to the wealth obtained by British trade with tropical and subtropical regions.

The second, female, Brazilian figure I wanted to represent was also virtually unknown in the English speaking world according to her only English-language biographer, the American educationalist and writer James Longo. Although not a professional historian, his 2007 biography of Princess Isabel Orleans Braganza was nominated for Yale University's Frederick Douglass Book Prize as the "most outstanding non-fiction book in English on the subject of slavery and abolition". Longo's book used primary sources to argue the case that Braganza, far from being an aristocratic dilettante, was a committed abolitionist.

For most of her life, Princess Isabel was heir to the throne of Brazil's constitutional monarchy. Her family, the Braganza dynasty, had ruled Brazil (as well as the global Portuguese empire) since 1640, and had previously been among the chief beneficiaries and architects of the entire trans-Atlantic slave system. However, the deeply religious 'princess imperial' had become, herself, a champion of abolitionism. As a result, during her temporary regency in 1888, whilst her father, Dom Pedro II, was out of the country, Isabel campaigned for, secured and signed into law the statute which abolished Brazil's chattel slave system, and which, (unlike in Britain), took immediate effect and provided no compensation for slaveholders.

The Braganzas were overthrown in a military coup soon after the passage of the 'Lei Áurea' or 'Golden Law' (as it became known), with Isabel and her family forced into exile in France, where she died in 1921. By comparison with, for example, Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), Longo believed that Braganza's memory had suffered some neglect—which he attributed to historiographical misogyny (2007; 3). Nevertheless, she remained a popular Brazilian folk-heroine, so that, ever since her 1971 reburial in Petropolis Cathedral near Rio de Janeiro, her

resting place had become something of a shrine (Longo, 2007; 1)—and, in 2014, a new biography in Portuguese was published by the Brazilian writer Regina Echeverria.

With regard to my own practice, incorporating the figure of Braganza into the unmasking composition represented a significant development, as it was the first time that I had depicted a prominent, white abolitionist in a painting that addressed the history of emancipation. This rendered visible my insistence that the unmasking methodology was not a mechanism for drawing overly simplistic conclusions about the moral status of any particular race, gender, class, nationality or even individual. Just as Henry Tate demonstrated that, as a white, British capitalist, he could practice philanthropy, so too did Braganza demonstrate that, as a white, Brazilian aristocrat, she could be instrumental in a globally significant, perhaps even revolutionary, transformation.

As one would expect of such a prominent figure, there were many well attested, and copyright free, images of Braganza available for appropriation in my artwork (See fig. 9.16). In some respects, the plethora of Braganza images illustrated the intersectionality of the race and class privileges which were available to her, as compared to the virtually invisible Firmina dos Reis. The images of Princess Isabel included full-length, portrait photographs of her that I believed might be effectively integrated into the compositional framework already established in my sketches. One of the other advantages of appropriating a recognisable image of Braganza was that, because she was a fairly familiar figure in Brazil, especially to people with a historic interest in emancipation, her inclusion in my composition would enable Brazilian viewers to understand the general, abolitionist theme of my *Sir Henry Tate* artwork.

Fig. 9.16: Donkor, K., Photomontage of three 19th-century portraits of Princess Imperial Isabel Braganza (and to the right, Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil). Photographs left to right by: Pacheco, J., 1870; Ferrez,M., 1887; Pacheco, J., 1870. For image histories see Lago (2008).

9.2 Articulating my body and site-specific research within the unmasking process

Fig. 9.17: Donkor, K., 2014. Studio photograph of self-portrait technique—remote controlled DSLR camera tethered to a PC viewed on a large monitor. The monitor displays two images: the most recently recorded photograph alongside a live view of what the camera is seeing.

The unmasking compositions outlined above, with their proposal to incorporate figures of Brazilian abolitionism and British black art, alongside the reclining *Sir Henry Tate* figure, all set in a vista that alluded to the exploitation and transportation of sugar cane and enslaved workers, offered a series of challenges and opportunities for reimagining Thomas Brock's portrait. Amongst these was how to reimagine Brock's likeness of Henry Tate as part of a fully articulated, reclining male nude in a tropical plantation.

Given the gesture and pose, which I envisaged in my sketches, and also the necessity of creating a figure to match the realistic style of Brock's work, I needed to find a white, male body who could fulfil the role I had assigned to Henry Tate in my composition. The most efficient resource available to generate such an image was my own body, which, utilising contemporary tools of self-portraiture, I could pose and paint as necessary, and on demand. Using a remote-controlled DSLR camera tethered to a large, computer monitor (fig 9.17, above), I produced a series of photographic self-portrait studies, which I would later use to create the painted figure of Henry Tate in my final composition.

Firstly, I established the position of the camera so that the image in the viewfinder reproduced the spatial equivalent of the low horizon line proposed in my final compositional sketch. What

I mean by this is that the lens was aligned along its horizontal axis so that the visible horizon line appeared beneath the centre of the image. Then, in order to effect the correct pose, I simultaneously viewed the computer monitor and my sketchbook drawings, adjusting my pose until I could see that the image on the monitor reflected the posture in my sketches. Most importantly, I adjusted the angle of my head so that the image in the monitor corresponded as closely as possible to my drawing of Brock's sculpture (see fig. 9.18, below).

Once I was satisfied that my postures and angles of view were correct, I recorded the image by remote control. The tethering system enabled me to instantly review the image I had just recorded on the monitor—side-by-side with a live view of my current pose. I could then use the live view to readjust my current pose, compare it with the most recently recorded image, and record a new image of the readjusted pose. I repeated this process until I had generated a series of images that corresponded to my intentions.

Fig. 9.18: Donkor, K., 2014. 'Photograph of self-portrait method'. Photograph. I tried to duplicate the head angle from my sketch for an appropriation/synthesis of Brock's 'Sir Henry Tate'—my sketchbook can be seen by my elbow, and in my left hand is the camera's remote control.

I then applied the same set of techniques—a remote-controlled, DSLR camera tethered to a large monitor—to generate photographic studies for the other two male figures in the compositional sketches, Luís Gama and the Donald Rodney. For the Luís Gama figure, I wore a suit (see fig. 9.19), which, given what I consider to be the near static fashion in male, western, formal dress over the past 150 years, was not dissimilar to that worn by the São Paulo lawyer—according to a photograph by Militão Augusto de Azevedo (1837–1905) (de Castro, 2000; 6).

For the Donald Rodney figure, I hired a wheelchair and wore casual, contemporary clothes. The wheelchair alludes to both the suffering and the inspiration which Rodney experienced as

a result of his debilitating and deadly sickle cell anaemia, and which the artist explored in many of his artworks, including his 1997 installation, *Psalms*, in which an autonomous, empty robotic wheelchair meandered through the gallery space using sensors to avoid the visitors. In my hand, I held a box which, in the painting phase of the project, was to be substituted for a representation of Rodney's proposed sugar-cube model of Tate Britain (see fig. 9.19, below).

Fig. 9.19: Donkor, K., 2014. 'Two photographs of self-portrait method'.
Left:. I posed for the Donald Rodney figure while my left hand operated the camera remote control.
Right: I posed for the Luís Gama figure, with the camera remote control in my right hand. The easel behind me supported a remote control flash unit.

In my compositional sketches, I had envisaged that, in order to effectively unmask the Henry Tate Africana which was 'fugitive' in Brock's sculpture, I would not only position the portrait of Henry Tate in relation to figures connected with Brazilian abolitionism and black British art, but also position all of the figures within a critically significant land and seascape containing architectural features, sugar cane and ships. These latter elements, further contextualising the iconographical relationships between the figures themselves, would be designed in order to emphasise and reinforce the historic, economic and geographic relationships that my initial critical reading suggested to have existed between Henry Tate and the trans-Atlantic world of plantation slavery. In the diagram below (see fig. 9.20) I have indicated each of those additional elements of the compositional sketches, numbered from one to ten.

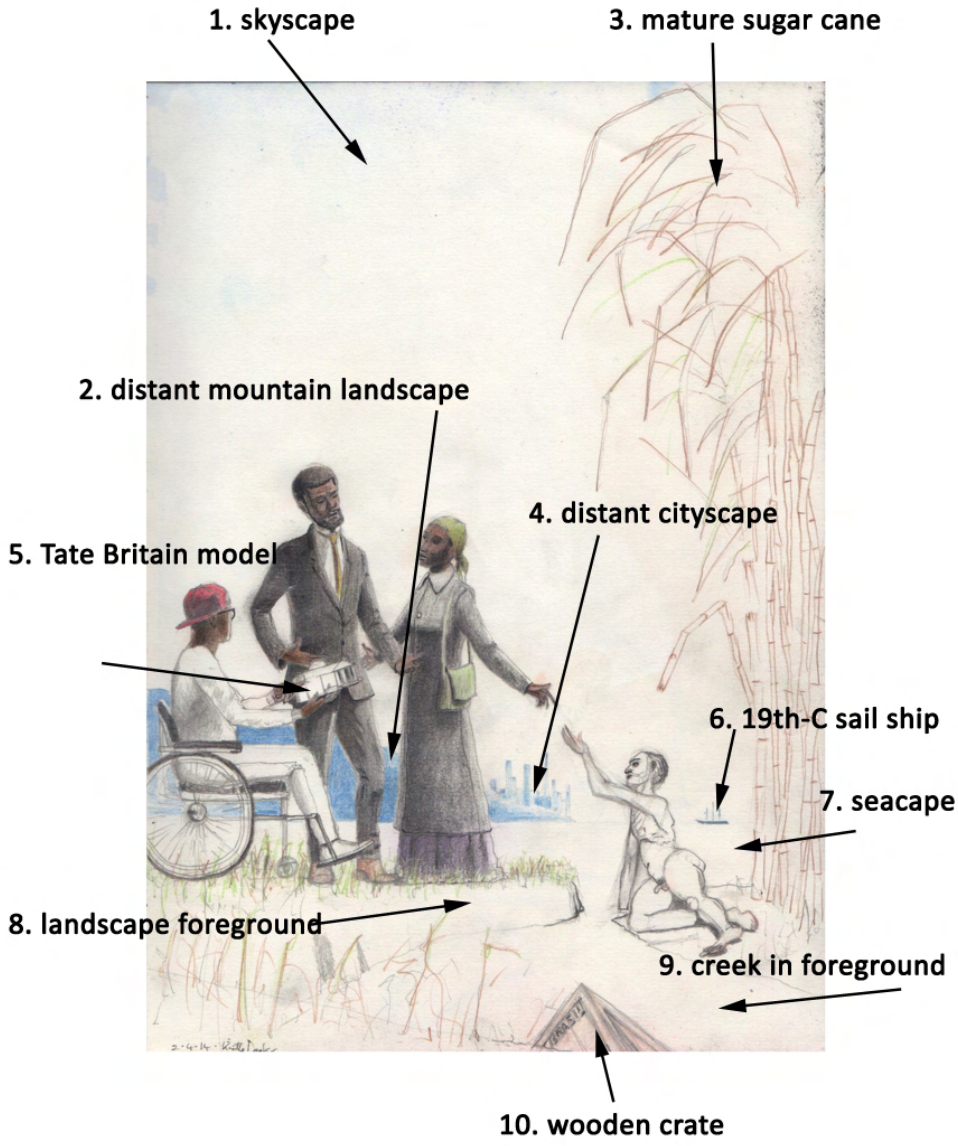


Fig. 9.20: Donkor, K., 2014. Diagram of the final compositional sketch for the unmasking Henry Tate artwork.Text indicates the elements that are not human figures.

I decided that these contextualising elements would have an approximation of the realistic perspective, style and detail that Thomas Brock had attained in his Henry Tate portrait, and which, I also needed to replicate in order to make my appropriation of his sculpture recognisable. This would mean, for example, creating a correspondingly realistic impression of the mature sugar cane, identified as item number three in the diagram. By applying this style to those additional motifs that existed alongside the five human figures, I hoped to produce an image in which my appropriation of Brock's portrait would be situated within an imaginary, vista that created the illusion of *Sir Henry Tate* as one element amongst an integrated network of spatial relationships.

In order to achieve this illusory space, utilising the ten elements identified in the diagram, I had decided that, in the first instance, I would mitigate the legal and ethical questions of copyright by not resorting to appropriations from photographs of Donald Rodney or, from photographs of Yolando Mallozzi's 1931, *Luís Gama* monument in São Paulo. With this as a condition, the most efficient way of locating the necessary land and seascape images was from my private archive, which contained tens of thousands of my photographic of studies of landscape, architecture, and other potential motifs. In consequence, if I wanted to achieve a realistic image of the mature sugar cane indicated as item three in the diagram, I needed to search my archive for suitable photographic studies of mature sugar cane.

One effect of undertaking this process for all ten of the contextualising visual elements was that it enabled me to saturate the composition with layers of visual meaning produced through my extensive studies of the visual world of trans-Atlantic Africana. Thus, in the case of the mature sugar cane, the inclusion of my own image of the crop disseminated the history of my own, visual study of a sugar-cane plantation in the Americas. Furthermore, I thought that, to the extent viewers of the unmasking work might become aware of this fact (by, for example, reading this thesis), it served to indicate that my interest in the economy of sugar had advanced beyond literary, textual encounters with the facts and figures of the international sugar economy, and had been pursued across the Atlantic in order to personally view, document and analyse at close quarters the conditions, climate and location of contemporary and historic sugarcane plantations.

Of course, it is likely, given their scale and tropical ubiquity, that hundreds of millions of people, including workers, residents and tourists, have seen, visited and worked on sugar cane plantations. In fact, I too used to live, as a child, close to one of Tate & Lyle's biggest, operational sugar plantations in southern Africa, near my former hometown of Mazabuka, in Zambia. Nevertheless, the inclusion of my cane image in an unmasking composition indicated that I had made a step beyond seeing and remembering the crop: it indicated that I had visually analysed the historic and aesthetic significance of this particular fragment of my archive of plantation imagery. By placing my representation of this archival fragment into a dynamic, critical relationship with other significant historic images, I hoped to engender questions about the hidden, historic realities masked beneath the patina of Thomas Brock's portrait *Sir Henry Tate*.

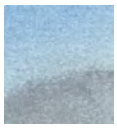
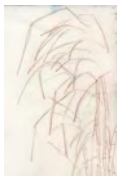
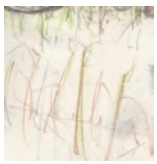
The importance of the process of placing my photographic archive into a compositional relationship with an image of Brock's sculpture was not that it made Henry Tate's probable use of slave-produced cane sugar any more, or any less, true historically. What it did, was to

allow viewers to exercise their critical facility about his life, and about artworks which celebrated him, in a way which was foreclosed and excluded by Thomas Brock's celebratory portrait and the eulogising contextualisation produced through the museum's captions, the elisions in Tate's biographies, and by the 'national forgetting' implicit in Brock's widespread, ever-present artworks (see chapter 10).

A recognisable representation of Brock's *Sir Henry Tate*, reworked to appear lifelike, and set within the frame of an image that also included a recognisable image of sugar cane, empowered viewers to make an association between, on the one hand, Henry Tate as a historic figure, having a biography that existed within a framework of industrial, imperial and aesthetic history, and, on the other hand, sugar cane as a historic crop, having a 'biography' which included the brutal enslavement of 11 million African people in the Americas over a period of 430 years.

In fact, the sugar cane image, which I eventually selected was photographed during my journey through the interior of Cuba in 2005. This fact, which viewers who read this thesis or other supporting documentation would be aware of, enhanced the symbolic power of the unmasking process because, as evidenced in Chapter 10, it was slave-produced sugar from Cuba, as well as from Brazil, that, during the mid-nineteenth century, dominated the global industry, flooding the British market and enabling refiners like Tate to rapidly expand their production and profitability.

The table below, (fig. 9.21), was created purely for the purpose of this documentation, in order to enable readers to precisely map each of the ten compositional elements proposed in my sketches of the Tate/Brock unmasking artworks with a corresponding image from my photographic studies archive, (including the date and location of each study).

No.	Element name	Sketch image	Photographic study	Year	Location
1	skyscape			2013	Mount Isabel de Torres, Puerto Plata; Dominican Republic
2	mountain				
7	seascape				
3	sugar cane			2005	Santiago de Cuba; Cuba
8	foreground				
4	cityscape			2008	Liver buildings, Liverpool; UK
5	museum			2013	Tate Britain, London: UK
6	ship			2013	HMS Warrior, Portsmouth; UK

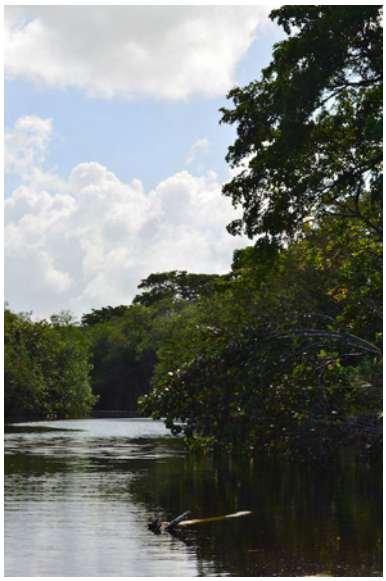
9	creek			2013	Rio Munoz, Puerto Plata; Dominican Republic
10	crate			2011	Tate Modern; London. Photo sourced from http://trailinghenry.info

Fig. 9.21: Table of elements for compositional sketch, indicating how drawn ideas were translated into photographic sketches. All photos except '10, crate' by Donkor, K., 2005–13.

As well as my study of sugar cane from a plantation in Santiago de Cuba (3), all of the unmasking elements in the table were photographed during my research trips to historic sites connected with the trans-Atlantic world of Africana. My study of the Liverpool waterfront from across the Mersey (4), which I visited in 2008, did not include the warehouses which now house Tate Liverpool and the adjacent Museum of Slavery, but was selected because the 1911, Royal Liver Building was probably the city centre's most iconic, recognisable edifice.

My studies of a bay, mountain and skyscape from the Dominican Republic (1; 2) was selected because Puerto Plata, which I visited in 2013, was the site where the English Admiral, Sir John Hawkins first sold 400 people he had abducted from Sierra Leone, thus launching Britain's long involvement with the enslavement of Africans in the new world. My study of HMS Warrior (6), a British naval ship built in 1859–1861, was made in 2013 during a research trip to Portsmouth. The significance of the ship for the unmasking process was that the date of her active service coincided with the career of Henry Tate, and also, that the British navy in which she served safeguarded the trans-Atlantic merchant shipping that transported millions of tons of slave-produced goods to the UK, long after the abolition of slavery in the British empire

itself—and, ironically, whilst the same navy was prosecuting slave traders.

My study of the Tate Britian building (5) was made in 2013 and was selected to enable my 'Donald Rodney' figure to hold a realistic model, similar to the one which he intended to construct out of sugar cubes for his own proposal to unmask the Africana embodied in Tate's financing of the museum. My 2013 study of a creek (9) near Puerto Plata fulfilled a similar, critical role to the study of the mountain and bay, adding a foregrounding element to the overall landscape, and thereby providing a close-quarters setting for the separation, by water, between *Sir Henry Tate* and other figures. It also was useful for representing a body of still water for the floating sugar crate.

The one photograph which had not been directly sourced from my own archive of studies was the image of a crate from the Tate & Lyle factory (10), which was acquired from the Trailing Henry website. Instead of attempting to incorporate this image into the composition, I decided to create an imaginary painting of a crate.

9.3 Constructing a composition that critically unmasks Brock's Sir Henry Tate

Fig. 9.22: Donkor, K., 2014, 'Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate—whilst Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza confer', oil paints on canvas. 100 x 80cm.

Fig. 9.22. is (again) an illustration of my oil painting, *Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate: Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza confer,* which was created by synthesizing the motifs identified in this chapter within a single frame. It was an artwork in its own right, but, I hoped it would also serve as the critical starting point from which I might create other works embracing similar themes, including possible oil paintings, drawings and prints, as well as other digital, participatory or installation works that I had in mind.

In accordance with the key methodology identified as being at the heart of the unmasking Africana process, a representation of Thomas Brock's portrait, '*Sir Henry Tate*', was recognisable as the head of the naked figure to the right of the image. For viewers unfamiliar with all of the figures, the title was intended to assist the understanding of my iconography. I shall now give a brief analysis of the artwork, including its title, that attempts to draw out, not only the significance of its imagery, but also, how I anticipated its reception and interpretation. In particular, I want to consider to what extent my unmasking methodology had been successful in generating an identifiable sense of criticality in the relationship between this work and Thomas Brock's portrait, *Sir Henry Tate*.

The title begins with the phrase, '*Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate*', which referred to the seated figure that I pictured reading to another. I had gendered one figure as female with the costume of a Victorian-era, western woman, including her coiffure and hair bands. She holds and points towards a book laying open in her lap. To her left, and at her feet, I represented a naked, pale, bearded man, and, in the contrast between their skin tones, we might immediately observe, as well as their gendered differences, also, those signs of racial difference that are normalized in western and colonized societies.

The woman's skirts were so voluptuous that they acted as a kind of blanket, on which, the man reclines. This, and their physical closeness, placed them in an almost intimate proximity. He makes a gesture, perhaps, to her, with his arm uplifted and hand spread open. To the extent that the title identifies one person, 'Maria' reading to another, 'Henry', I intended viewers to understand that it was these two figures which represented Maria and Henry. In the artworld, the name 'Tate' has become such a globally recognised brand, that there was already the possibility that, for some viewers, this naked, male 'Henry Tate' might have some connection with the museum complex. Amongst those viewers who did recognise that the naked man was intended to represent Henry Tate (probably, all who read the title), I expected that some, either by familiarity, or else by an act of 'micro-research', might identify that the face and head bore a resemblance to the sculpted portrait created by Thomas Brock.

For viewers with a close interest in British art, the fact that one of the figures was holding a model of a grandiose, pillared and domed, white, stone building, might strengthen their impression that the Tate Gallery was of relevance to the work. Indeed, I hoped that some of those who first encountered this artwork, in my viva display at Chelsea College of Art, would identify the model as the building next door to the college, which was the museum itself—particularly as the angle of view, from the side, as opposed to from the front—was analogous to that seen from some parts of the college.

And, for connoisseurs of British painting, (which, given that I am a British painter, it was not unreasonable to suppose that such people would see this work) it might be apparent that the 'Maria' figure was drawn from the figure in Millais' 1874, *The Northwest passage,* which is held by the Tate Gallery. Above, and somewhat behind the two figures on the right, was a grove of a tall kind of grass or cane. To anybody who had lived in the tropics, particularly in the countryside, I hoped this would be familiar as sugar cane, given that its cultivation was very widespread. Given that a large percentage of London's population (where I lived and practiced) had ancestral links to tropical regions of Africa, Asia or the Americas, it made sense to assume that such viewers (not to mention online visitors) would accurately identify this crop. For those who, because they were culturally embedded in the northern countries, were not familiar with this crop, I intended that the crate in the foreground, inscribed with the text 'CANE SU HENRY TATE & LIV', might assist in identifying the sugar cane.

Because the title also identified three, other, named individuals with the phrase, '*Luís Gama, Princess Isabel and Donald Rodney confer*', I intended viewers to understand that, excluding the reading-and-listening couple on the right, it was the three on the left who represented Gama, Isabel, and Rodney. Because one of them was also wearing Victorian-era, western, female costume, I intended viewers to identify her by the female name, Princess Isabel—although, I did not expect the majority of English speakers to know who 'Princess Isabel' was. Nonetheless, I did expect that many Brazilians, and others interested in Brazilian history, might identify her as the woman who signed the 'Golden Law' (Lei Áurea) into statute. For those viewers, I hoped that, because Isabel's role in history was so specific, her figure would associate the entire image with Brazilian slavery and its abolition. The identification of Isabel, would, I hoped, also be aided by the Brazilian national flag on the crate in the foreground.

I therefore expected that Brazilian viewers, at least, would readily understand my intention to draw associations between, Brazil, sugar cane, trade, slavery, Henry Tate and the Tate Gallery. This association might perhaps come as a surprise to viewers, as no historian or artist has previously made a specific connection between these specific, iconographic, historic entities (unless, I count George Martineau's revealing, but obscure, 1918 commentary—see Chapter 10). In addition, I wanted viewers to be aided in making these associations by the presence of the tall-masted ship, intended to evoke historic, trans-Atlantic trade and navigation.

On the far shore of the bay, I intended that viewers familiar with Liverpool, would recognise the Liver Building. Those who were familiar with Henry Tate as a famous resident, and also of the city's earlier connection with the slave trade, the sugar industry and its own version of the Tate Gallery, might understand that the image intended to link these iconographic elements. It

is even possible that viewers who live in, or who have visited, Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic will be able to identify Mount Isabel de Torres, particularly as I have included (on a much expanded scale) an image of the statue, *Christ the Redeemer* (Anon, 1970), which is on top of that peak. Because Paul Landowski's (1875–1961) original, 1931 statue is even more familiar as an icon of Rio de Janeiro, it is possible that this element might also contribute to identifying Brazil, or Rio itself (the home of Princess Isabel) as a key to understanding the picture.

Because I have been identified as a black British artist (Chambers, 2014; 174), I hoped that viewers familiar with black British art as an art-historical discursive formation, would be able to identify Donald Rodney as the figure in the wheelchair, holding and gesturing towards the model of Tate Britain. In addition, I thought viewers familiar with 19th-Century Afro-Brazilian literature might know who both Dos Reis and Gama are, but, as with Rodney, I knew they were not as well recognised as Henry Tate or Princess Isabel, even in their home countries.

In that sense, the image performed a kind of critical inversion, by which the two most famous, admired and philanthropic, white figures were placed, physically, at the margins, whilst the three black figures, (all of whom might be considered as historically marginalized, relatively), occupied more central positions in the framing of my composition. Even so, the actual centre of the tableau was not visibly occupied by any human figures, but was populated by images related to the sugar trade (Liverpool, Hispaniola, the sea, the crate and a ship).

9.4 Critical reflections about the unmasking of Brock's 'Sir Henry Tate'.

Given the surfeit of significations, associations, allusions and relations available in *Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate—whilst Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza confer*, I was not sure that it was entirely successful as a work that critically unmasked the Africana which lurks in the iconology and meta-history of Thomas Brock's portrait of Henry Tate. Or rather, I thought that its success would depend strongly on the identity and, particularly, the intellectual interests and emotional investment of each viewer. Of course, this could be said of all artworks, just as in the case of a non-English speaker who fails to appreciate the entire beauty or logic of untranslated Shakespearean sonnets. However, I did think that my references to historically well-known figures, each of whom would be familiar to particular groups of viewers, had the potential to stimulate further micro-research, perhaps by enticing online searches of the unfamiliar names.

I intended that viewers, who already knew about the anti-slavery campaigners, Gama, Dos Reis or Braganza, and who also knew of Henry Tate, might ask the most critically challenging, 'unmasking' questions. They might want to interrogate the associations I was making between

Henry Tate and Brazil, sugar and slavery, art and abolitionism. And yet, without further contextualisation, even such an informed viewer might, by looking at the picture and title alone, wonder whether (for example) it simply illustrated a little-known tale of how the founder of the Tate gallery had been found naked in a Brazilian sugar plantation before learning to read and sailing to England? Perhaps, what I created was, in effect, an 'agglutination of symbols' (Barthes, 1977; 32) which were neither critical nor complacent? In consequence, I realised that because familiarity with my figures and motifs would fluctuate with each individual viewer's knowledge, engagement and interest, then each one might, inevitably, concoct their own, private legends with which to interpret my work. One solution, could be to change the title of the work to: '*Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate—whilst the Brazilian abolitionists, Luís Gama and Isabel Braganza, confer with Donald Rodney'.* This would have contextualised the work further, without a full exposition, and remained an option to me.

If though, this work seemed too complex to read easily, to open to interpretation, should such polysemy be thought of not as a 'dysfuntion' (ibid; 39) but as its strength: interpreted as reflexively self-critical of the unmasking process itself. This was because, although, I was sure that my evidence, outlined in chapter 10, indicated Henry Tate had, quite probably, exploited directly the produce of Brazilian and Cuban slave labourers, I also had to concede that such evidence was circumstantial.

I therefore thought that my artwork acknowledged, through its iconographic complexity, how Brock, the gallery, and Tate's legacy corporations had, together, seemed to form a dense web —an almost impenetrable trail of translations of one form of capital into another: the labour of enslaved human capital had been translated into raw-sugar commodity capital; and then into Tate's factory capital; and, from his factory profits, wealth had then been translated again into financial capital; and from that financial capital it had been translated further into the cultural and 'ethical capital[43]' represented by the Tate gallery; and finally, this history of accumulation had been condensed into the symbolic capital represented by the supposedly ennobling work accomplished by Brock's sculpture. I wondered whether *Maria dos Firmina Reis reads to Henry Tate*… was, like its subject, confusing, contradictory and, perhaps, somewhat sinister as it gathered the art-historical ghosts of a Dickensian Christmas Past to conduct a contemporary artistic exorcism.

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43. My use of the term 'ethical capital' does not refer to the kind of 'ethical capitalism' suggested by such phenomena as the 'Fair Trade' movement. Instead it refers to a concept described by Beverley Williams, et al. in their 2010, sociological study, *What's a poor man got to leave?*. The authors positioned their work as a development of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and, based on their research with dying U.S. veterans, they argued that ethical narratives can be regarded as a specific form of cultural capital, transmitted to others in ways that attest to the noble motives and conduct of the owner, and enrich the experience of the receivers.

Fig. 10.1: Donkor, K., 2014. 'Sir Henry Tate by Brock, T., 1897, at Tate Britain'. Photograph.

Introduction

What follows is an account of the 'critical reading' phase of the unmasking Africana methodology, which I used to create *Maria dos Firmina Reis reads to Henry Tate*…—my artwork intended to unmask the fugitive Africana embodied by Thomas Brock's bronze bust, *Sir Henry Tate* (1897). The Tate's collection contained two artworks representing Sir Henry Tate (1819–1899), the founder and benefactor of the eponymous museum. As well as Brock's work, the museum also held an oil painting by the German-born Sir Hubert Von Herkomer, R.A., (1849–1914)—also made in 1897 and called *Sir Henry Tate.* Although I preferred the flexibility of three dimensional viewpoints afforded by Brock's sculpture, and so did not focus on the Von Herkomer work, my critical-reading into the biography of Henry Tate may be taken as broadly applicable to the Von Herkomer painting as well.

Fig. 10.2: L: Brock, T., 1897. 'Sir Henry Tate' in Windrush Square, Brixton, London. R: White version in the window of Streatham library, London. Photos by Donkor, K., 2014.

A slightly larger version of Brock's portrait bust, also bronze, stood in the piazza to the front of the public library, which was gifted by Henry Tate to the people of Brixton, South London: the bust itself having been gifted by Lady Tate in 1905 (see fig. 10.2, above). Another copy, in marble, was, at the time of writing, on public display in the highstreet window of the Tate Library in Streatham, South London, which was yet another public institution donated by the local philanthropist (see fig. 10.2). However, because these copies were not strictly part of Tate's collection of British art, they did not form the primary focus of my enquiry. Nevertheless, as with Von Herkomer's painting, what I have written about the biography of Henry Tate and the artistic intentions of Sir Thomas Brock also applied to the replicas.

My critical readings about *Sir Henry Tate* by Brock centred on two themes relevant to the artwork, and by extension, to my attempt to unmask fugitive Africana, which I suspected Brock's sculpture might embody. These themes were: the artistic intentions of Thomas Brock; and, the life and work of his sitter, Sir Henry Tate. My intention was to establish whether Africana was a useful criteria for interpreting Brock's work. In particular, I was interested in discovering the extent to which profits extracted from enslaved, African, sugar-plantation labourers in the Americas, constituted a 'condition of existence' for Brock's sculpture: what role did racial slavery play in the biography of Brock's subject? At stake for me was, whether or not, (and if so, how) to apply the other phases of my unmasking Africana methodology: observation; appropriation/synthesis; reflection. That is to say, would I decide to undertake an artwork that attempted to 'critically unmask' Africana in relation to Brock's sculpture? Obviously, Chapter 9, about my own artwork, *Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate: Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza confer* (Donkor, 2014), affirmed my conclusion that Brock's work did embody fugitive Africana, and that it did, therefore, facilitate critical practice to apply the unmasking Africana methodology.

10.1 Organizing my critical reading into Brock's *Sir Henry Tate*

For critical reading about the artistic intentions of Thomas Brock, my primary sources included his artworks, which I viewed in person. As well as his portrait busts of Henry Tate, there was his 1887 monument titled *Sir Bartle Frere*, his 'ideal sculpture', *Eve* (1899) and his monument, the *Victoria Memorial*, (1911–1924) which stood before Buckingham Palace. I also visited the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) to read Brock's correspondence.

The secondary sources about Brock's art, which I read, included the two major texts about him. The first, completed in 2002, was the PhD thesis by Dr. John Sankey C.M.G., Phd (b. 1930) who stated, as his rationale, that hitherto '[Brock] had not been seriously studied'

(Sankey, 2002; 3). The thesis was titled *Thomas Brock and the Critics—an examination of Brock's place in the New Sculpture movement*, and was accepted by the University of Leeds. From Sankey I leant that *Sir Henry Tate* was commissioned by a group of eminent Victorians, including the Director of the National Gallery Sir Edward Poynter, R.A. (1836–1919), and that after its exhibition in the Royal Academy it was presented to the National Gallery of British art in honour of Sir Henry's role in building the new institution (Sankey, 2002; 134). I also learnt that Tate had commissioned a marble version of Brock's most successful 'ideal' sculpture, *Eve* (1899), and gifted it to the museum.

The second, major text about Brock was the memoir, *Thomas Brock: Forgotten Sculptor of the Victoria Memorial* (2012), written by Brock's son Frederick (1880–1940) in approximately 1928, after his father's death in 1922. The manuscript was unpublished when it entered the V&A's National Art Library collection in 1986, where there was initial uncertainty about its authorship. The memoir, edited by Sankey, was published, with V&A approval, through 'Authorhouse' self-publishing, in 2012. In her forward, Marjorie Trusted, Senior Curator of Sculpture at the V&A, noted Frederick's 'adulatory tone' (Brock, 2012; L98) and 'desire to rehabilitate his father's reputation in the midst of 20th-century shifts in taste' (ibid). Nevertheless, the memoir was an intimate insight into Brock's art and social context.

10.2 A critical Reading of Brock's career in relation to Africana

I thought, looking at Brock's naturalistic, life-sized portrait, *Sir Henry Tate,* during my 2013 visit, that there was an intended, 'dominant' decoding (Hall, 1980): an interpretation which seemed, in part, encoded through statements produced by the museum. This included a dominant, Henry Tate, founding mythology, produced by texts such as the Tate Gallery's official history by Frances Spalding (1998), in turn based on official histories by former Tate Director John Rothenstein (1959) and the corporation Tate & Lyle (formed from the merger of Henry Tate & Sons with Abram Lyle & Sons in 1921) (Jones, 1960)—all of which, I document in this chapter.

This encoding affirmed Brock's subject as a noble, clever, generous art lover—responsible for the wonderful galleries in which his portrait resided. This reading was reinforced by the naming of the museum: 'Tate Britain', whilst ubiquitous 'Tate' branding saturated the institution with Sir Henry's 'good name'. (One example of this is the 'Tate' branded 'Fair Trade' sugar, which bears the logo, not of the sugar company, Tate & Lyle, but the museum—see fig 10.2b, below).

Fig. 10.2b: Donkor, K., 2015. Tate-branded sugar photographed at Tate Modern. Photograph

And, allied to that dominant reading, was the, supposedly, neutral 'professional encoding' (Hall, 1980) of the anonymous museum label: 'Thomas Brock 1847–1922 Sir Henry Tate, exhibited 1898 Bronze on Stone base' (Anon, undated) which, in its austere brevity, seemed to disavow engagement with narrative detail, except to state the protagonists names, linking them to 'purely technical' materials and dates.

However, as my critical reading of Sankey, Brock's chief biographer, revealed, 'neutrality' was not Brock's intention as an artist. Born, in Worcester in 1847, Thomas Brock was the son of a well-to-do decorator, William, and his wife Catherine. Aged 10, he enrolled in Worcester's Government School of Design but, after two years, became an apprentice in a porcelain factory. In 1866, aged 19, he left for London, where, after his father secured a letter of introduction from an aristocratic client, Thomas joined the studio of one of Britain's most successful, monumental sculptors, the Irishman John Foley (1818–1874). Whilst with Foley, he was accepted into the Royal Academy Schools and completed his studies two years later, winning a gold medal.

Brock had continued to work for Foley until the latter died, aged 56, and it was the terms of Foley's will that had shaped Brock's career—because the workshop was overflowing with orders for bronzes of royalty and the aristocracy, and the dying master had decreed that Brock finish them. Consequently, (after some legal wrangles) Brock found himself, at 27, supervising the figure of Queen Victoria's long-mourned husband for the *Albert Memorial* in Hyde Park.

This acceptance of Imperial patronage meant that from then on, detached, artistic neutrality was out of the question: the young sculptor had decided to become a key, political artist and henceforth devoted his life to a single, artistic project—glorifying and monumentalising the ruling elite of the British empire. In writing about his monuments for Queen Victoria's 1897 Diamond Jubilee, Sankey argued that:

Brock was quick to recognise that patriotism and pride called for a large, bolder figure with imperial

> *attributes (such as the Winged Victory on the orb) and a higher pedestal decorated with plaques symbolising the Empire and the achievements of Victoria's reign. (Sankey, 2002; 179)*

For Sankey, it was clear that Brock intended to mobilise the political ideologies of patriotism and imperialism, celebrating the empire's victories. Nevertheless, from Frederick Brock, I discovered that his father did not keep a journal recording his day-to-day thoughts, nor did correspondence elaborate on what his individual works expressed (Brock, F., 2012; L3334).

However, a manuscript letter dated 3rd February 1901, which I read in the National Art Library, contained, as a postscript, an invitation requesting the art critic Marion Spielmann to visit his studio and view 'a bust of the Queen for Christ Church, Oxford which I should much like you to see' (Brock, T.). On reflection, I thought that the brevity of his postscript seemed almost disingenuous in its humility, given the circumstances. The work, titled *Queen Victoria*, (Brock, 1901) was carved in white marble and, as well as Oxford, copies were distributed to other sites. Because in this brief remark Brock seemed to make little of his politics, I knew that in order to understand his work I had to consider the context, that is, the iconology, of that particular bust.

Queen Victoria had died just days earlier on the 22nd of January, and because Brock's work was a highly finished naturalistic marble portrait, he had, possibly, been working on it before her demise. However, right up to her very last moment, Victoria was deeply embroiled in a racial war of imperial conquest in South Africa, now called 'The Boer War' (1899–1902). Reading *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (2010), a history of Victoria's last Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, written by the British historian Dr Andrew Roberts, I discovered that in 1899 the leader had announced his war aims in Parliament:

> *There is no doubt the white races will be put upon an equality, and that due precaution will be taken for philanthropic and kindly and improving treatment of those countless indigenous races… (Salisbury IN Roberts, 2010; 743).*

Salisbury asked MPs to consider 'whether the future of South Africa is to be a growing and increasing Dutch supremacy or a safe, perfectly established supremacy of the English Queen' (ibid). This meant that the Boer War had been framed in explicitly racial terms, as a war for *white* equality, English supremacy and black inferiority—with the latter being implied by the claim that indigenous races were in need of 'improving' by a 'kindly' empire that was to be maintained by machine gun. In consequence of this information, and given Brock's work on his bust of the English Queen, I wondered what her role had been in this racial war for white supremacy in Africa, and how did that political context impact on the portrait?

I learnt that, in fact, Victoria had encouraged her Prime Minister to prosecute the war, telling

him she was: 'shocked at the shameful want of patriotism of the [Parliamentary] Opposition'—many of whom voted against Salisbury's policies (ibid; 744). The historian Denis Judd reported that she sent 100,000 tins of chocolates to encourage 'her dear brave soldiers' (2013, 129). Of course, I had already learnt when making my *Yaa Asantewaa* painting that Victoria's armies were simultaneously fighting another war of white racial supremacy against the Kingdom of Ashanti in West Africa.

Sankey reported that Spielmann was impressed by Brock's *Queen Victoria* and that, rather than portraying 'the Empress of India' as an arrogant aggressive white supremacist (which was my own interpretation of her action) he felt the artist had produced unflinching praise for the monarch by emphasising her wisdom and thoughtfulness: 'the Queen at her best—elegant, thoughtful, wise and solemn.' (Spielmann IN Sankey, 2002; 177).

In 1913, speaking at an award ceremony in Worcester College of Art, Brock had disavowed 'the portrayal of ignoble rather than of noble things' (Brock, T., 1913, IN Brock, F., 2012; L5967). Art had 'lofty aims' that were 'vital, invigorating and pure' and the artist's social role was to exercise:

> *a refining influence, and any expression which does not exert that influence can only be regarded as debased. (ibid)*

This view was echoed by Brock's artistic peers, such as Alfred Gilbert (1854–1934), who declared 'whoever saw [his own sculpture] should be elevated by it, something that was not the mere imitation of an everyday person' (IN Getsy, 2004). Undoubtedly, then, *Sir Henry Tate* was not conceived of in neutral terms, but as an expression of what Brock considered to be unmitigated nobility. This element of my critical reading had led me to understand that, for Brock, making a portrait bust was intended to constitute, and to be regarded as, not so much a mimetic passive reflection of a person's outward appearance, but rather, as a methodology for producing total praise for his subject's character.

10.3 Thomas Brock's other Africana works

Fig. 10.3: Brock, T., (1887) Bartle Frere. Bronze on stone base. Whitehall Gardens, London. Photo by Donkor, K., 2014.

Brock's *Queen Victoria*, like his *Sir Henry Tate,* did not seem to display signs readily associated with the horrors of war (unless, a viewer decoded Victoria's likeness as a warlike motif) or, with respectively, the intrigues of the sugar industry. But that did not mean the artist was 'ignorant' or uncomprehending about the contexts through which his work would be be understood. At times, he signified explicitly that he had made an Africana artwork, that is to say, he displayed his support for the subjugation of African peoples by inscribing prominently the text 'Africa' on his sculpture.

I discovered that, in 1887, ten years prior to his Tate portrait, Brock's bronze monument to the former High Commissioner of South Africa, Sir Henry Bartle Edward Frere, was unveiled where it still stood, at almost 7.5 meters tall, overlooking the Thames in the public, Whitehall Gardens section of the Victoria embankment in London's central-government quarter. It sported a bronze plaque with the inscription 'Pro Patria' (Latin, meaning 'for the fatherland') and two other, one-metre-high plaques with the inscriptions 'India' and 'Africa', respectively. According to the June 1888 edition of the sculptor's journal, *The Builde*r (IN Sankey, 2002; 115), the work symbolised 'victory achieved, peace sought and readiness to maintain honour with the sword' and Sankey described the work as 'one of Brock's most important public commissions' (ibid). In 1879, Frere had ordered the British army to invade the independent Zulu kingdom, precipitating the Battle of Rourke's Drift, (subject of the frequently broadcast,

1964, Michael Caine movie, *Zulu).*

Fig. 10.3: Brock, T., 1887. 'Bartle Frere'. Detail of the inscription 'Africa'. Bronze on stone base. Whitehall Gardens, London. Photo, by Donkor, K.,2014.

The amateur historian Digby Thomas, in his book *The Rise and Fall of Bartle Frere: Colonial Rule in India and South Africa,* recalled that neither the war nor Frere's role were uncontentious in Britain. In the four years preceding the sculptural commission the imperial governor's career:

> *…was destroyed, his name reviled in England. Politicians criticised him openly in Parliament and the press was vitriolic. The Spectator [journal] referred to him as a man with "no influence but for evil". (Thomas, 2009; xiv)*

In part, Frere's downfall was a direct consequence of the initial Zulu victory at the Battle of Isandlwana—the day before Rourke's Drift.

Eventually, despite British losses at Isandlwana, Frere won his war, overseeing the massacre of thousands of Zulu people and annexing their kingdom into Victoria's empire. Nevertheless, at least some portion of the antipathy towards Frere, including his summary recall to London, was due not simply to the 'national stain' of the Isandlwana defeat, but also because of a perception that the crisis had been precipitated by his 'pathological' behaviour towards Africans—as recounted in the essay "B*utchering the Brutes All Over the Place": Total War and Massacre in Zululand, 1879,* by the British historian Michael Lieven (Lieven 1999 IN Pizzo, 2007; 266). Even the eminent novelist Sir Anthony Trollope, an acquaintance of Frere's and normally a cheerleader for violent paternalistic imperialism, had denounced his warmongering ultimatum to the Zulu king Cetshwayo kaMpande as 'the most arrogant piece of despotic rule I have seen in my time' (Trollope, 1983; 842).

In effect, when Brock undertook the Frere commission after the latter's death in 1884, he did

so as part of a coordinated effort by the Prince of Wales to rehabilitate the late, imperial governor's tarnished reputation (Sankey, 2002; 114). Indeed, I thought that Brock, by inscribing the word 'Africa' onto his monument, could be interpreted as justifying Frere's aggression: asserting, through the inscription 'Pro Patria' that the governor had acted as a noble patriot, rather than a foreign invader.

However, even if it could be argued that the inscriptions had been mandated by the commission, such a contention would not, in my opinion, absolve Brock from his responsibility as the artist who had carried out the eulogising work. During my visit in 2013, the presence of the monument, alongside other 'heroic' statues in lovingly maintained gardens, suggested that Brock's complicity in the sculptural ennoblement of Frere had been, in part, a successful artistic strategy—because the entrance sign to the gardens described him only as an 'enlightened administrator', with no mention of the Anglo-Zulu war.

Thus Brock, prior to his commission as the sculptor of Henry Tate's bust, had a record of making prominent, state propaganda aimed at rehabilitating a perpetrator of imperial aggression—and this included taking overt, artistic decisions about Africana. Unsurprisingly, Brock's career continued to new heights, culminating with the gilded *Victoria Memorial* (1911–1924) in front of Buckingham Palace. It was hailed by the American painter Edwin Austen Abbey R.A.,as 'one of the great achievements in the history of British art' (Sankey, 2002).

Nevertheless, in an age of encroaching Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism and Vorticism, Abbey's opinion was not universally shared[44] and, in her book on the New Sculpture movement, (with which, Brock—like his one-time assistant and protege—Fehr, had been associated), the art historian Susan Beattie (d.1989) recalled one critic damning it as 'idiotic' (Beattie, 1986; 230). Even so, given that, in the early 21st century, it was still at the heart of London's tourist trail, it was possibly one of Britian's most photographed and visited artworks. Furthermore, the continued display of Brock's work at Tate, the home of British Art, suggested that, even in the early 21st century, elements within the wider British artworld had continued to embrace him.

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44. The French art movement, Fauvism, led by Henri Matisse, had made an immense impact on the western artworld between 1900 and 1910, with its garish colours, rugged outlines and an emphasis on the artist's bold, gestural marks. Cubism, Futurism and Vorticism, between 1907 and 1914, also challenged the boundaries of aesthetic taste, rejecting many of the academic principles of form, such as linear perspective, which had been established as European artistic norms since the Renaissance. Both Abbey and Brock were staunchly representative of the more conservative artistic trends in form, which had been under sustained assault since the Impressionist movement of the mid-19th century. For a primer on the impact of these art movements, see *A World History of Art*, by Honour and Fleming (1985/2002).

Fig. 10.4: Brock, T., (1911–1921) The Victoria Memorial. Bronze, gilt and marble. Photo by Donkor, K., 2014.

10.4 Accusation and denial in the contextual representation of Sir Henry Tate

As well as the art history of Thomas Brock and the economic history of Henry Tate, I discovered recent discursive interventions, which indicated the existence of a dominant encoding of Brock's *Sir Henry Tate*. Eddie Chambers, writing in 2012, resisted this dominant encoding by affirming that, 'sugar merchants such as Tate… were implicated in, and benefited from the …means by which sugar cane was grown and harvested' (Chambers, 2012; 180). Emphasising the wretchedness of 19th-century sugar-cane production, Chambers felt Henry Tate ought to be regarded as a 'beneficiary of the economic realities of slavery's legacies' and he critiqued the record of Tate & Lyle's industrial relations in 20th Century Jamaica.

However, both the Tate Gallery and the Tate & Lyle sugar and food processing corporations had, in recent years, denied repeatedly the *possibility* of a contemporaneous link between Sir Henry Tate and 'the slave trade', and also, with slavery itself. The most recent context for such denials was the 2007 bicentenary of Parliament's 1807 Act to Abolish the Slave Trade. Writing for BBC online, the journalist, Gavin Stamp reproduced, uncritically, a press statement from Tate & Lyle PLC:

> *"When Henry Tate and Abram Lyle established their businesses in 1859 and 1865 respectively, the slave trade had been illegal in Britain for more than 50 years," the firm says. "Neither family was previously connected to the sugar trade (sic)" (Stamp, 2007)*

The Financial Times carried a similar statement, reported, also uncritically, by Jonathan Guthrie (2007). The Tate Gallery's equally emphatic denial was no longer hosted on its live website but, it was accessible on the UK government's internet archive. This anonymous curatorial text 'Sir Henry Tate' (Tate, 2007), established a specific argument, indicating how the museum wanted gallery visitors to think about its founder, and, by implication, its artworks about him:

> *Sir Henry Tate wasn't born until 1819 and* ***he did not start his sugar refining business until 1859, many years after the abolition of slavery*** *and his fortune did not come from sugar production—it came instead from his embrace, as a refiner, of new technology which allowed him to modernise the distribution and commercial marketing of cane sugar in competition with sugar beet refiners in Europe. Sir Henry was* ***merely a bulk purchaser of cane sugar*** *and there is no evidence that his business came any closer than that to the* ***post slavery Caribbean plantations****. [my emphasis](Tate, 2007)*

I read this text as problematic factually and logically: so, in the first instance, the gallery's claim that Sir Henry's fortune 'did not come from sugar production' seemed tendentious. However, after noting Tate's embrace of technology, that initial error was contradicted by an acknowledgement that he was, after all 'a refiner' and, indeed a 'bulk purchaser of sugar'.

My real critique though, was of the statements that: i) Tate's sugar refining started 'many years after the abolition of slavery' and that; ii) 'there is no evidence that his business came any closer' to the 'post-slavery Caribbean plantations' than buying sugar. On the contrary, my own critical readings had informed me of two facts which the museum, Tate & Lyle, and the reporting journalists did not appear to have considered. The first was that slavery in the sugar plantations of the Americas continued, on a massive scale, for a further 29 years after Tate began refining. The second, unconsidered fact was that millions of tons of slave-produced, raw cane-sugar were imported into Liverpool for processing by refineries before Brazilian abolition in 1888. (Thomas 2006; Martineau 1918; Forster, 1869). I deal with these matters in more detail in my summary of Henry Tate's historiography, further on in this chapter.

On a web page, entitled *1807 and Tate: background*, the museum set out its educational objectives around the bicentenary, as a curatorial strategy to 'engage and inform the wider public', (Tate, undated) including a Tate Britain exhibition, *1807: Blake, Slavery and the Radical Mind*. In this context, the gallery conceded 'a specific historical strand which links Tate to the [bicentenary]', (ibid) of the slave trade's U.K. abolition. Again, stressing Sir Henry's 1819 birth as being after the 1807 Act, it acknowledged that the fortune of the 'notable philanthropist':

> *was founded on the importation and refining of sugar, the product which* ***emerged from the history*** *of slave colonies in the Caribbean. Tate, therefore, takes the trade and its history as an element of its own founding history. [my emphasis] (ibid)*

The claim that Tate's sugar imports 'emerged from the history' of slave colonies seemed, to

my mind, like sophistry—an attempt to reinforce the dominant consensus that Tate's sugar production post-dated a supposedly 'historic' plantation slavery. Thus, I felt the gallery's welcome concession that the slave trade was 'an element of its own founding history', was also intended to be read in the light of its denial of Henry Tate's specific involvement. That is to say, it was a conciliatory way of restating the claim that Tate's sugar was imported from the 'post-slavery Caribbean'. Furthermore, even this concession was, soon, no longer part of the museum's live online content, and had, to my knowledge, never been published in print.

Therefore, in the period of this research, (2010–2015) I felt that my artistic encounter with Brock's portrait was contextualised primarily by the anonymous, online museum caption, which celebrated, uncritically, Henry Tate's business acumen… 'he made his fortune through a new process of sugar refining and by selling sugar in neat, white cubes' (Tate, 2010).

Evidence that this hegemonic, benign construction of Henry Tate's 'official' biography continued to play a role in art discourse, came during a 2014, online debate about BP's corporate sponsorship. In her reply to a post claiming that The Tate Gallery was founded on the profits of slavery, Bridget McKenzie, a former museum employee, acknowledged that sugar was implicated in slavery and imperialism, but countered the claim by asserting that 'Henry Tate made his fortune after purchasing the patent for the sugar cube in 1872 (sic), and by refining locally grown (sic) sugar beet.' (McKenzie IN Rustin, 2014).

10.5 Other artists and the masking and unmasking of Henry Tate Africana

My critical readings revealed to me how other contemporary artists had addressed the Tate sugar fortune's inferred connection to enslavement, even if they did not refer to specific evidence of slave-produced Brazilian and Cuban raw cane-sugar supplies, which I shall detail later in this text. As I have mentioned already, Chambers recalled an unrealised proposal by the British conceptual artist Donald Rodney, to construct a model of the Millbank Tate museum out of white sugar cubes (Chambers, 2012; 179), (Mathison, 1995).

I also learnt that a comparable idea (at least, in its visually denotive form) was taken up by the Belfast-based sculptor Brendan Jamison, who had made two Tate-related sculptures out of thousands of sugar cubes—his specialized method of work. One was a model of Henry Tate's mausoleum in West Norwood cemetery, called *Sir Henry Tate's Mausoleum* (2012) and the other was a scale model of Tate Modern called *Tate Modern* (2010). However, the explanatory text about Sir Henry on Jamison's website noted only that the 'sugar trade and art have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship since the 19th century'—there was no overt overt discourse suggesting any criticality, so his practice invited a celebratory reading only, with sugar regarded

by the artist as symbolic of 'all things nice… [and] sparkling sweetness' (Jamison, 2013).

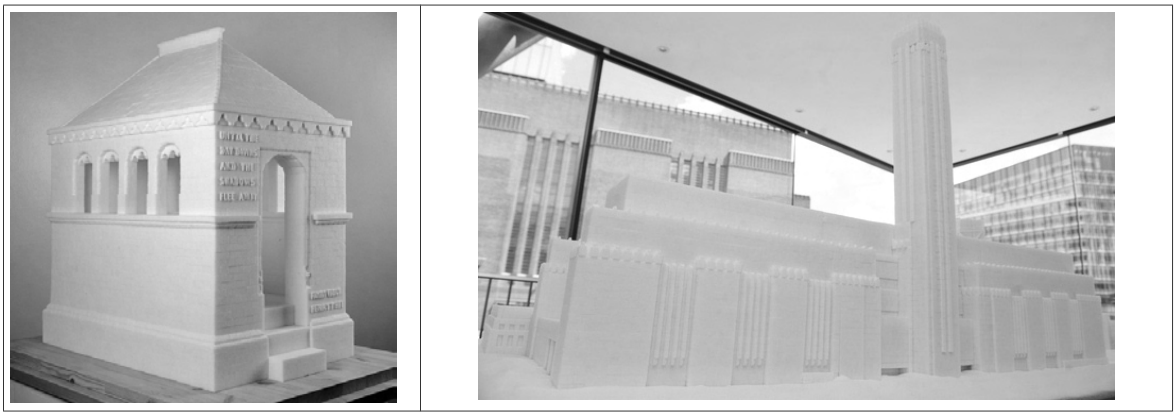

Fig. 10.5: Left: Jamison, B. (2012) Sir Henry Tate's Mausoleum', sugar cubes on wood base. 65 x 75 x 75 cm, Photo by Corey, T., (2012) Right: Jamison, B., (2010),'Tate Modern'. Sugar cubes. 100 x 200 x 140 cm. Photo by Knotek, A. (2010)

On the other hand, Keith Piper's mixed-media work, *The Seven Rages of Man* (1984), evinced a more critically engaged practice when it was first displayed at London's Black Art Gallery as part of Piper's first solo exhibition, called *Past Imperfect, Future Tense*. The work consisted of a seven groups of four, square, sugar-paper wall-panels: each painted and collaged with appropriated images from Pan-African, black history (Piper, 2014). Affixed to one panel in each group was a painted, wooden board representing the frontal silhouette of a man's shoulders, and to each pair of shoulders was attached a partial, plaster cast of the artist's head and face. These were constructed so that the shoulder-shaped board and the facial cast almost appeared to be a single bust—perhaps ruined by conflict, or by time itself.

During our 2014 interview, Piper explained that the seven casts represented 'I'—a symbolic personification of the black race (or, at least the 'Man' of the title). 'A 'first person'—as this symbolic person who lives in all of these ages' (Piper, 2014):

> *The work is an attempt to look at historical ages, but also to project the future. The first age was the original age in Africa; the second age is about slavery. The third age looks at the post-slavery plantation. The fourth age is about initially coming to the UK. The fifth age was sort of projected into the current day, the growing militancy of the early 1980s. The sixth age is projected into the future, (to do with the politics of the time) where freedom fighters are fighting in a revolutionary era. The seventh age is a projected return to a unified, socialist Africa. It was very much about those Pan-Africanist politics of the time, an idealistic narrative. (Piper, 2014)*

Large, hand-painted texts created a poetic monologue that articulated the grand narrative arc, stretching from pre-colonial Africa, through slavery and colonialism, to a future liberation. On the second group of panels, the shoulders of the self-portrait were bare, with the text,

Fig. 10.6: Piper, K., 1984. 'The Seven Rages of Man' (detail) mixed media assemblage.

'PROPERTY OF TATE & LYLE', stencilled in red across his chest. A metal collar gripped the figure's neck, with a hefty, steel chain hanging freely from it. However, Piper recalled that:

> *We [didn't] see the slave plantation as a place of resistance… Groups like OBAALA [Organisation for Black Arts Advancement and Learning Activities], never saw the Caribbean or the U.S. as useful politically… there was nothing we could draw from that history. (Piper, 2014)*

Chambers interpreted *The Seven Rages of Man* as a critique of the Tate & Lyle corporation for having 'a history that stretches, albeit indirectly, back into the days of slavery' (2012; 183). I thought it was closer to my own attempt at a critical unmasking of Brock's *Sir Henry Tate,* because it denoted the connection between the Tate fortune and slavery more explicitly than Rodney's more connotative idea. Piper did not claim to have based his work on a specific artwork in Tate's collection, but, as a thinker of African-Caribbean heritage, and at a time of racial conflict in the UK, he understood the common-sense assumption that 'everybody knew' Tate & Lyle were Caribbean plantation owners with a relationship to racial slavery. Piper regarded his work as having a similar, anti-corporate aesthetic to the British collage artist Peter Kennard (b. 1949), whose work featured in leftwing magazines of the 1970s:

> *This whole thing of naming specific companies [such as with] Tate & Lyle's relationship to slavery and sugar plantations… was about a history which we knew and were attempting to articulate through this work. I was influenced by artists like Gil Scott Heron, who was naming companies… with that level of detail specifically… and also Hans Haacke's work about Jaguar and Land Rover in apartheid South Africa… Jeremy Deller does something very similar… an attempt to*

> *examine how specific capitalist enterprises work in relation to social injustice… The infra-structure established in those moments forms the basis of the infra-structure now. (Piper, 2014)*

He also believed *The Seven Rages of Man* was his implementation of a radical 'Black Aesthetic' along lines proposed by the American writer Addison Gayle, Jr in 1971 (Gayle, 1971) (Piper, 2014). Consequently, in considering the intentions of Piper's work, I read the two Tate corporations' slavery denials, made in 2007, as a rebuttal to the kind of history painting and sculpture adopted by Piper and Rodney. Conversely I regarded my later, unmasking work as a kind of affirmation and elaboration of those earlier, artistic, critical interventions.

A more recent artwork, with claims to addressing the life of Henry Tate, was the *Trailing Henry* participatory event by the artist/research collective known as 'They are here'. In 2011, wall posters in Brixton's Tate Central Library announced that Willy Wonka-style 'golden tickets' had been secreted inside library books (Theyarehere, 2011). The first, twelve finders were invited on a series of visits to Sir Henry's Park Hill mansion and West Norwood mausoleum, as well as to both art museums and the still operational Silvertown refinery. The work included discussions and guidance from experts—even some of Tate's descendants.

Trailing Henry was sponsored by Tate & Lyle, the Tate library and the Tate Gallery, and was documented in a blog (Theyarehere, 2011). One participant, Melanie Mauthner, contributed a poem to the blog entitled '*Gran-u-late*', which contained the explicit demand 'Yo, Henry time to make amends for slavery…' (Mauthner, 2011). Yet, without a specific reference to Brazil or Cuba, I believed her intervention was vulnerable to the hegemonic, 1978–2007 denials from the corporations: namely that Tate started refining after British abolition in 1833–8. Moreover, even with this contribution, I thought the overall theyarehere project—despite the Roald Dahlesque, sinister sweeties allusion—seemed to convey more of a celebratory tone, rather than a sustained critique about 'the flow of capital' (Theyarehere, 2011) which it aspired to trace.

10.6 Critical readings and the biography of Brock's sitter, Sir Henry Tate

Because Thomas Brock (whose work was always about 'noble things'), as well as The Tate Gallery and the Tate & Lyle corporations, had all contributed to a hegemonic discourse which constituted the sculpture, *Sir Henry Tate,* as the portrait of a noble man, it was necessary to apply my unmasking methodology to test whether such nobility included profiteering from enslaved African labour. However, before detailing my critical reading of biographical texts about Henry Tate, it will be useful if I state what my reading suggested were consensus facts in the fields of history and economics about the sugar refiner, Britain and slavery.

Firstly, Henry Tate was a refiner in a country that did not produce the raw material (Chalmin, 1990; 3). Throughout the 19th-century, all raw sugar was imported: either, as raw beet-sugar

from Europe, or, else, as raw cane-sugar from the tropics (Chalmin, 1990; 1). With regard to slavery, among the many definitive historical texts weren*The Slave Trade—The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440–1870,* written in 1997 by the British historian Hugh Thomas (Baron Thomas of Swynnerton, b. 1931) and also, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) by the historian Dr Eric Williams (1911–1981) (who became, later, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago).

These texts, by leading scholars in the field, informed me that British companies, individuals and the state, from the mid-16th to the mid-19th century were leading participants in the kidnapping, trafficking and enslaving of millions of African people in Africa and the Americas, much of which was to facilitate cane-sugar production in colonial, slave-labour camps ('plantations'), for export to British refineries. Following from this, there were a number of uncontested facts which, for my own methodological clarity, I decided to order in a chronological list:

1673: Allen Smith opens first Liverpool sugar refinery for imported, slave-produced, raw, cane sugar.
1690s: Liverpool shipping joins the slave trade
1789: The French revolution
1790–1800 Britian traffics 400,000 Africans into slavery on the plantations of the Americas
1798: 150 Liverpool ships are engaged in slave trading
1804: The Haitian revolution abolishes slavey on the island and establishes a black republic
1807: Britian abolishes its own international slave trade.
1807–1870 Britain campaigns militarily and diplomatically against foreign slave-trading in the Atlantic.
1819: Henry Tate—7th son of a teacher/minister and his wife—is born in Chorley, Lancashire
1834–38: Britain abolishes slavery in **its own** colonial empire (plus, colonial India in 1843)
1846–1854: Britain ***removes*** punitive tariffs on foreign, slave-produced, raw cane sugar.
1859: Henry Tate, grocer, becomes a partner in one of nine Liverpool sugar refineries
1869 Henry Tate takes over his Liverpool sugar firm, starts building new 'Love Lane' refinery
1863–1886: Slavery abolished on Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, U.S. and Cuban sugar plantations
1888: Brazil becomes the last country in the Americas to free 720,000 enslaved Africans
1889: Henry Tate, one of Britain's richest men, offers his collection of Fine Art to the nation.
1896: Henry Tate retires.
1897: The National Gallery of British Art, financed and built by Henry Tate, opens at Millbank, London; **Tate is portrayed by Brock and Von Herkomer**.
1899: Sir Henry Tate, 1st Baronet, dies.

Given that these were the uncontested facts (Thomas, 2006; Jones, 1960; Spalding, 1998), two specific questions that my reading needed to address were: did Henry Tate, between 1859 and 1888, refine raw sugar produced by enslaved Africans in Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico or Surinam? And if so, did the conditions of existence for Thomas Brock's *Sir Henry Tate* include Tate's profiteering from slavery?

Fig. 10.7: Donkor, K., 2015. The Tate & Lyle, cane-sugar refinery at Silvertown, London. The plant employed 850 people in 2013—140 years after opening. Photograph.

I identified, and categorised the relevance of, the available evidence: with regard to primary sources, neither Henry Tate, nor his two wives, as far as was known, kept journals. There were a few letters held in the Tate Gallery archive, written in Sir Henry's latter years to journalists and officials about the National Gallery of British Art. Tate & Lyle Sugars, which was a descendant corporation of Henry Tate & Sons, (the company Henry Tate founded) kept an archive, which included some surviving business correspondence and corporate records dating back to the mid-19th century, some of which had been published by researchers. Although they were listed as having their papers counted as part of Britain's National Archives (Archives, NRA 22871; Donkor, 2014), Tate & Lyle Sugars did not acknowledge my written requests to visit their archive, which I made after telephoning them (Donkor, 2014).

Fig. 10.8: Donkor, K., 2015. Streatham Library, still open in 2015, having been gifted to the public of Streatham, south London by Henry Tate in 1890. A version of Brock's bust of Henry Tate was on display in the window when this photograph was taken. Photograph.

Nevertheless, a kind of 'cultural archive' was formed by the buildings, paintings and sculptures which Tate did not personally create—but, because he bought, owned or commissioned them, I found them to be informative about his tastes and interests (see my photographs of Tate's south-London public library buildings in fig. 10.8, fig 10.9 and fig 10.10). Despite there being a variety of secondary sources, they were sparse in biographical detail: there had never been a full, scholarly biography of Henry Tate. I found this opacity surprising and also disappointing, given that Tate, who led a large, educated and successful family, had established, as well as many libraries, one of the world's greatest art museums and one of the world's most durable, multinational corporations (Chalmin, 1990; xvi) (producing foodstuffs which, probably, every person living in Britain in the last one hundred years had eaten).

Fig. 10.9: Donkor, K., 2014. Tate Free Library, was still serving the public in 2015, having been gifted to the people of Stockwell, south London by Henry Tate in 1888. Photograph.

In fact, despite the enduring success of his many profitable and philanthropic ventures, a small biography in book form did not appear until almost 40 years after Tate's death. Then, in 1937, an obscure, 59-page document was printed privately by Mr R.H. Blackburn, the borough librarian of the small town of Chorley, in Lancashire, where, in 1819, Henry Tate was born. In 1940, Blackburn's book, titled *Sir Henry Tate—his contribution to art and learning*, was reprinted by the Chorley Guardian, the local paper. Reading in the British Library, I noted that it did not correspond to 21st-century standards of scholarly biography, as it had no index, footnotes or bibliography and produced odd lacunae (it did not, for example, name either of Tate's wives). However, Blackburn did write about Chorley's history, Sir Henry's mother Agnes Booth, and also, his father, William, a Unitarian minister and schoolmaster for working class children.

Fig. 10.10: Donkor, K., 2015. Now known as Brixton Library, the Tate Free Library was still open in 2015, having been gifted to Brixton, south London by Henry Tate in 1892. Photograph.

Henry arrived in Liverpool, aged 13 in 1832—sent by his father to be an apprentice grocer to an older son, Caleb. This meant that when Henry arrived the port still imported, refined and—through its grocers—also marketed, sugar produced by Africans enslaved in the British empire (slavery was abolished in 1833–8). According to the American historian Douglas C. Stange, Unitarians like the Tates were a Christian, religious sect which had been illegal in Britain until 1813. Many, like the British ceramicist Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795) had been prominent in anti-slavery abolitionism (Stange, 1984; 37). But this did not mean that the movement had been universally abolitionist, because others, such as U.S. President Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), were themselves prominent slaveholders (Peterson, 1960; 129) (Finkelman, 1996; 175).

Indeed, I was aware of no texts that documented any Tate family involvement in abolitionism, even though Blackburn's text was a (necessarily parochial) hagiography that summarised the remarkable variety of Henry Tate's philanthropic deeds and public works. That being said, the artistic value to me of Blackburn's text was that, after a period of historiographic neglect, it marked the opening salvo in the reconstitution of a dominant, hegemonic narrative of Henry Tate's absolute nobility, which had faded from discourse in the years after Tate's 1899 death and burial in London—where he had lived in grand style since about 1875.

In order to follow the unmasking African methodology consistently, I decided to embark on the critical reading of a series of industrial, and art-historical, mini-biographies of Henry Tate. And, the next biographical text to be published first appeared in 1952, as a supplement to the (now) obscure journal, *The American and Commonwealth Visitor*. Written by Tom Jones, a Tate & Lyle employee (Jones, 1960; 4), it was republished in book form by Tate & Lyle in 1960, and bore the title, *Henry Tate 1819–1899: A Biographical Sketch*. Because Jones was an employee, and the book was published by his employers, I thought it prudent to consider his scant, 33-page text as being, in some respects, a form of corporate propaganda: so, its artistic value for me lay in how it demonstrated the re-emergence of a corporate, hegemonic, narrative aimed at institutionalizing a celebratory, Henry Tate mythology.

A further intervention into the formation of a dominant narrative about Henry Tate also came came from an institutional source, in the guise of a 1962, overview of The Tate Gallery's collection by its then Director, Sir John Rothenstein CBE, PhD (1901–1992). However, his *The Tate Gallery* (1962) concentrated on the Sir Henry's financing of the museum. Its artistic value, to me was that Rothenstein's critique of a 'plutocratic' influence on British art demonstrated the possibility of a 'negotiated decoding' (Hall, 1980) of the industrialist's biography (1962; 15, 16, 104).

In 1972, Tate & Lyle again addressed the magnate's life, commissioning the Liverpool factory's Chief Chemist, John Watson, to write a 155 page book, *A hundred years of sugar refining: The story of Love Lane Refinery 1872–1972,* which the company published in 1973. Compared to Jones (1960), Watson produced a more detailed factory history, which I hoped might excavate the corporation's trans-Atlantic ties. But, it was Watson, who—after more than 40 years at the plant —revealed his main research problem was the secrecy of Henry Tate and his descendants:

> *The greatest difficulty has been the lack of records relating to the early years of the refinery. What there are largely seem to have survived by chance… one of [my] first tasks… [in 1927] was to be handed a large bundle of papers by the manager, T.B. Bailey, with instructions… to … personally supervise their destruction in the boiler fires. (1973; 1)*

In fact, Jones, in 1960, had also appealed for more information, and blamed himself for not having the time to 'complete a more exhaustive system of search'. Watson, though, felt it was not his system which was at fault, but corporate practice. Later, in his text, he restated his frustration:

> *A veil of secrecy was imposed over the refinery in the early years and this persisted until after I joined… Visits of outsiders… were positively forbidden. Any records…were kept by the manager for his and the directors' eyes alone… old records were destroyed. With this policy it is not surprising that so little information has survived. (Watson, 1973; 77)*

Reading Watson's claim, as, in itself, a primary-source account of Tate & Lyle's corporate culture, it seemed to explain other texts relating to the origins Henry Tate's fortune: he had instituted a systematic 'policy' of corporate secrecy and destruction of records. In 1985, Tate & Lyle published Watson's concise, 31-page text of *Random Notes* about Henry Tate and his Liverpool refinery, detailing information he had discovered since 1973, including photographs of letters written to Tate by leaders in the arts. His reading of Tate's correspondence provoked the following response:

> *Henry Tate has left behind him a reputation as an undemonstrative, withdrawn, almost shy man whose preference was to remain in the background. However the more one thinks and reads about his life the more one wonders if this was merely his public image. For his private life a somewhat different picture emerges. (Watson, 1985; 14)*

What distinguished Watson's texts from those of Jones and Blackburn was that, as a senior employee, he critiqued the company, and its founder, for secrecy and mythologising. I thought his work valuable, artistically, because his own destruction of records positioned him as a conflicted participant in the hegemonic 'veil of secrecy' which, he had identified. I also studied two, more substantial volumes, which attempted to produce a history of Tate & Lyle (and, also, Henry Tate & Sons). Given Watson's 1973 critique, it was unsurprising that the first

of the two, by Antony Hugill (1916–1987), published in 1978, had announced itself as unapologetic, corporate propaganda:

> *[Tate and Lyle and their descendants] have been resilient, and tenacious… courageous… adaptable… [with] gentle toughness. The present Board of* ***Directors*** *characteristically* ***wanted this*** *mixture of qualities, warts and all,* ***to be presented*** *in a light-hearted manner' (Hugill, 1978) [my emphasis]*

Hugill was an Oxford-educated retired Tate & Lyle Director, and his *Sugar and All That: a History of Tate & Lyle* produced a mix of information-dense corporate and social history, autobiography and 'blokey' jocularity. However, despite being superficially 'informative', it was, largely, unreferenced. This meant that his constant anecdotes, and his *Goon Show*-style[45] switches in tone had only added to a sense of conservative mythologising. This was apparent in Hugill's praise for Tate & Lyle's massive, 1969, investment in Apartheid South Africa, at which point he also described African people as 'Kaffirs' (ibid; 307)—a notorious, racial epithet (Hughes, 2008; 126). The text's artistic value for me lay in its demonstration that Tate & Lyle had countered the critique of Watson by producing an absolutist, corporate mythology which ('warts and all') represented Henry Tate and his company as, in every conceivable sense, an unmitigated force for good. It seemed that Hugill marked a decisive, totalizing return to the 'noble things' discourse produced by Brock and R.H Blackburn.

Then, in 1990, a 782-page volume: *The Making of a Sugar Giant: Tate and Lyle, 1859–1989* produced by the eminent, neoliberal, French economist Phillippe Chalmin (b. 1951) was published by Harwood Academic Publishers. It was the first (and only) scholarly, non-corporate history of Henry Tate's business empire. However, with regard to the tycoon's mid-19th century industrial and trading operations, Chalmin produced little more than his predecessors. Nevertheless, he also acknowledged that there was a veil of corporate secrecy:

> *…writing a history of Tate and Lyle depended …on the ease of access to original sources. The management… [opened] up to us [only]* ***the majority*** *of their existing archives before 1950, though denying access for the more recent period… (Chalmin, 1990; xvi) [my emphasis]*

Whatever the 20th -century corporation was hiding, Chalmin confirmed Watson's complaint that, in their early history, '…the Tates were in the habit of destroying most of their documents' (Chalmin, 1990; 84).

A more recent, industrial-history text, from 2012, was *The Sugar Girls*, by the professional writers Duncan Barrett and Nuala Calvi. They had documented the memoirs of mid-20th century women, working at the company's East-End, London factories, including the

45. The Goon Show was a 1950s, BBC Radio comedy show, known for its surreal, 'madcap', brand of humour.

postcolonial experiences of African-Caribbean, as well as white, employees. Whilst I regarded it as an important project, the book barely acknowledged the existence of Henry Tate. However, despite this, and the elision of the firm's early history, it did have some artistic value for my unmasking project. This was because it demonstrated the merit of representing the struggles of individuals from under-recognised social groups, whose labour had helped facilitate corporate profitability—and so, had led to the founding of the Tate Gallery, and hence, to Sir Thomas Brock's portrait.

The Tate: A History, written in 1998 by the art historian Dr Frances Spalding CBE was, like Rothenstein's work, published on the authority of the museum (Spalding, 1998; 7). Spalding reproduced data about Henry Tate's aesthetic interests and his 1890 plan to donate his art collection to the nation, but her interest in the foundations of his fortune amounted to four bland sentences. Spalding's artistic value for me, lay in demonstrating the continued institutional tendency to produce layers of mythology that implied Henry Tate's essentially noble character, which, I felt, further entrenched the hegemonic encoding of Brock's sculpture. However, her attempt to emphasise the potential role of Henry Tate's second wife, Amy née Hislop (1845–1919), in the formation of his tastes and social activity (ibid; 12) also re-enforced my view that the social identities of the various interlocutors was playing a clear role in how Tate was portrayed, in writing—as well as in visual art. Consequently, whilst the other, predominantly male writers had virtually ignored both of the Mrs Tates, Spalding, a female writer, seemed to be suggesting a more feminist interpretation of the magnate's life.

10.7 How the principal Henry Tate biographical texts dealt with sugar-plantation slavery

Perhaps, given my observation about the roles of male and female identity in the writing of Henry Tate texts, it should have come as no surprise that most of the principal Henry Tate texts listed above, written by white writers, paid little attention to the historical connection between sugar and the enslavement of Africans by European colonialism. It was true that Blackburn (1940) had been interested in a Liverpool abolitionist called William Roscoe (d.1831), but, in fact, Roscoe had died before Henry Tate arrived, and his inclusion served only as an example of Merseyside philanthropy. Jones, though, noted that Liverpool's 17th-century refining industry began after 'trade with the West Indies had been opened'—but he omitted to mention it was slave-produced sugar (1960; 5). Similarly, Watson, Rothenstein and Spalding entirely omitted the history of Liverpool, sugar and slavery.

Only Hugill had produced a potted history of sugar that tried to address slavery, slave trading, abolitionism and even, African resistance. But, his attitude to the subject seemed ambivalent and defensive—so, with regard to Caribbean history, he declared that:

> *A mass of literature and documentation covers the horrors of the middle passage and the evils of the slave trade, and this is not the place to stress them. (Hugill, 1978; 18)*

He then produced a lengthy polemic about the plight of British Navy sailors—a diversion from considering enslaved, African, sugar-plantation labourers—which, instead, invited sympathy for those responsible for protecting the slave ships (ibid; 18). Hugill (who had also derided Africans as 'kaffirs'—ibid; 307) claimed there were 'too many' Caribbean social histories, and pleaded that: 'There is… no history of Tate and Lyle involvement in the slave trade, for slavery had been abolished a century earlier' (ibid; 111).

I decoded his statements as rhetorical tactics of diversion: nowhere did he document an accusation that Tate & Lyle were 'slave traders'—and any serious questions would have been directed at Henry Tate & Sons, not Tate & Lyle, per se. Hugill's diversionary rhetoric contextualised his defensive repetition of Watson's unreferenced claim that, in 1872, the Love Lane refinery 'drew its supplies from Peru, Mauritius, and the East and West Indies' (ibid, 37) —that is to say, everywhere except Brazil (although of course the slaveholding, sugar-cane exporters Cuba and Puerto Rico could be included under the ambiguous term 'West Indies').

Because no text had considered, openly, systematically or conclusively whether Henry Tate & Sons refined slave-produced, raw-sugar from outside the British Empire, my critical reading of their collective, artistic value to my project suggested a series of hegemonic, mythological encodings of omission, diversion and evasion. However, Chalmin's text did touch on the subject of slavery, incidentally—although, not to consider if Tate had used slave-produce.

Chalmin had noted that, after 1854, Britain stopped applying punitive tariffs against imports of raw-sugar from slaveholding countries (Chalmin, 1990; 31). He produced a table, showing that, from 1870 to 1889, raw sugar from Brazil and Cuba accounted for between 7.7% and 31% of all British refinery imports (ibid; 27). I deduced, from these bare statistics, that Tate's operations coincided with massive imports of slave-produced, raw-sugar from outside the emancipated British empire. Chalmin's statistic had made a hairline-breach in the hegemonic discourse, which had disavowed any, possible, direct Tate connection to contemporaneous slavery. Artistically, I considered it to be a rupture in the bond fastening Brock's calm mask of nobility to Tate's secretive biography: but, could that mask be removed, entirely?

10.8 Another rupture in the hegemonic mask—from a close, Henry Tate informant

My efforts were aided by one figure, who reappeared in most of the industrial Henry Tate narratives as being amongst their key sources (Jones, 1960; 20—Watson, 1973; 20—Chalmin, 1990; 764). When in 1875 Tate purchased the industry-leading Langen patent for making sugar-cubes, he did so jointly with another, London-based refiner who thereby became a

business associate: George Martineau (1836–1919) (Chalmin, 1990, 75). The 1918, fourth edition of Martineau's book *Sugar, Cane and Beet: an Object Lesson*, was intended as a primer on the British industry: however his personal links with Henry Tate also meant that Martineau was one of the closest historical informants about the magnate—which added to his credibility.

Early in his text, Martineau affirmed that in 1860, there were nine Merseyside refineries (including the one which Henry Tate had recently invested in). But then, he produced, what was, in the structure of my critical reading, a revelatory statement that: 'their raw material came largely from Brazil, Liverpool being the principal goal for ships from that country' (Martineau, 1918; 8)—importing 15% of all the raw-cane-sugar imports into Britain (ibid; 3).

Like Chalmin, Martineau did not explicitly state that the Liverpool refiners had used slave-produced imports after the 1854 tariff reforms: in fact, nowhere in his 159–page text did he mention slavery. However, as an artist critically interested in Africana, it was my prior knowledge that Brazil and Cuba did not abolish slavery until 1886–8, which enabled me to understand the significance of Martineau's point. His concern, in mentioning the high-level of Liverpool's 'largely' Brazilian imports, was only to claim that the Liverpool refiners:

> *were, therefore, accustomed to work a rather low class of raw material, and consequently turned out a considerable proportion of yellow sugar (ibid; 8).*

This was a technical detail, also confirmed by Watson (1973) and Jones (1960). For Martineau, the importance of his observation was that 'at a later period' Tate became an exception (Martineau, 1918; 8). By this, he meant that Tate's clever purchase of the 'Boivin-Loiseau' patent in 1870, enabled him to radically increase the proportion of white sugar which could be refined from Brazil's 'low class of raw material' (ibid; 84).

I felt that my critical reading of Martineau constituted a breakthrough in my quest to understand slave labour and Victorian sugar refining, so I decided to cross-check his claims about Brazilian imports to Liverpool. I learnt that the economic historian Professor Peter Eisenberg (1940–1988) had, in 1974, published his book on sugar plantations and abolition, *The Sugar Industry in Pernambuco*[46]*: Modernization Without Change, 1840–1910*. He paid specific attention to the *export* destinations of Brazilian, slave-produced sugar, and calculated that, during the key years of Henry Tate's activity, from 1860 to 1888, Britain imported between 53% and 77% of all Brazilian sugar (Eisenberg, 1974; 23) amounting to a total of three million tons. Reading *Slavery in Brazil*, by the historian Herbert S. Klein I learnt that despite international condemnation (mostly from its key trading partner Britain) Brazil's sugar-

46. Pernambuco is one of the north-eastern regions of Brazil and, during the 19th century, was a leading producer and exporter of raw-cane sugar.

plantation, slave-labour economy increased throughout most of the nineteenth century (Klein, 2009; 82). It was from Africana Studies professor Bert Barickman of Arizona University, that I learnt how, at emancipation in 1888, the survivors of what had been Brazil's two million-strong enslaved African labour force amounted to 720,000 people (Barickman, 1996, 605).

My final source of critical reading on this subject was suggested by Martineau, as well as other writers, who had cited an industry journal published in Manchester by Galt & Co. and which, during the 1860s, was called *The Sugar Cane*, (later it became *The International Sugar Journal*—still in print by the 1980s). Each month *The Sugar Cane* published statistics from brokers and warehouses in London, Bristol, Liverpool and Greenock about stocks and deliveries of imported, raw-cane-sugar supplies for local refineries. Under its editor William Forster it also provided a year-to-year breakdown of what countries those sugar stocks were imported from.

I learnt that in the year to 1869 the Liverpool refineries imported 31,000 tons from Brazil plus 27,000 tons from Cuba and Puerto Rico combined—all three of which were slaveholding sugar economies (Forster, 1869). That year, the 'emancipated' British Empire only accounted for 16,000 tons out of Liverpool's importation of almost 100,000 tons—so, 60% was from slaveholding states (ibid). However, from April 1874, a letter of complaint by the Liverpool refiner Thomas Easton prompted a change in editorial policy, removing city-by-city import records. Although exporting countries were still noted, it became harder to determine the distribution of Britian's slave-produced raw sugar (Forster, 1874).

The artistic value of the *The Sugar Cane* for me lay in its role as a primary source from the industry itself, revealing in detail how Liverpool depended heavily on the importation of slave-produced raw-sugar during Henry Tate's first 14 years as a sugar refiner—but also, how Liverpool refiners then successfully redacted that information from the public record.

None of my critical readings suggested that any British refiner after 1854 refused to process the millions of tons of slave-produced raw-sugar imports, or protested about its provenance. I suspected that Britain's post-emancipation exploitation of slave labour in the Americas plantation system, almost 60 years after the so-called 'abolition' of slavery within the empire's borders, had been neglected for a long time historically and artistically. Nevertheless, it had not been forgotten entirely: so, Hugh Thomas had recalled diligently that in 1860 the slaveholding Spanish Caribbean (Cuba and Puerto Rico) accounted for twenty percent of Britain's refinery market—but he did not name refiners (Thomas, 2006, 767).

Similarly, in 2010, British historian Richard Huzzey explored why Parliament, which was committed to abolition and the suppression of the slave trade, had removed punitive import

duties from slave-produced sugar. But, like Thomas, he did not identify the refiners in question. *Free Trade, Free Labour, And Slave Sugar In Victorian Britain* (Huzzey, 2010) was Huzzey's first published paper, coincidently, appearing in *The Historical Journal* just as I was embarking on my research. However, by the time I started *Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate*… in 2013 he was co-director of the Centre for the Study of International Slavery and, as of 2014, was supervising PhD's with intriguing titles such as *Supply Chains and Moral Responsibility: Slavery and Capitalism after British Emancipation,* and also *Slavery, Independence, and Empire: Britain and labour in Latin America, c. 1840–1888* (Huzzey, 2014). In consequence, I realised that historical scholarship in this field was developing and would probably provide artists, such as myself, with more data for interpretation.

From my perspective as an artist wrestling with the neglected iconology of Thomas Brock's *Sir Henry Tate,* the long period of disinterest in Victorian slave-produced sugar imports seemed like an intellectual product, a kind of reverse 'cultural capital' of unknowing that had been generated by the concerted efforts of refiners, shippers, brokers, journalists and politicians to mask their involvement—using their profits to construct a hegemonic mythology of legality, entrepreneurship, philanthropy, aestheticism and liberalism.

The artistic value of these concerns for my 'unmasking African' methodology was that my critical reading had transformed my understanding of Brock's sculpture—from seeing it as a complacent, almost uninteresting site of technical accomplishment and patrician pride, into considering it as a more complex object, conceptually. It was, I now thought, an artwork through which the aggressive imperialistic society and attitudes of both the sitter and his sculptor might be conjured into view.

10.9 Conclusions about Henry Tate, African slavery in the Americas and Thomas Brock

My critical reading into Thomas Brock's *Sir Henry Tate* suggested that his subject played a contradictory role in Victorian society. Born in humble circumstances, the sugar refiner had employed thousands of workers in two cities and organised the supply of millions of tons of calorie-rich, sweet-tasting foodstuffs for mass consumption. He became a generous philanthropist, donating libraries, educational, artistic, health and social facilities to communities in Liverpool and London (Blackburn, 1940). On the other hand he was a luxuriant, secretive 'plutocrat' who rose to prominence in an industry mired in centuries of violent abuse, and who apparently destroyed his company records systematically.

Following my research, the most generous thing I could propose about Tate's relationship to the concurrent exploitation of slave labour by the Liverpool sugar industry was that,

apparently, he kept silent about it. His silence had subsequently been naively (or perhaps self-servingly) perpetuated by many of his contemporaries, as well as by his biographers and the employees of the institutions he founded—the Tate & Lyle corporations and the Tate Gallery. So, given their corporate culture of secrecy and their documented history of embracing Apartheid, if Tate & Lyle had produced a documented account demonstrating unequivocally that between 1859 and 1888 Henry Tate had never exploited enslaved African labour in his supply chain, I would have been deeply sceptical.

Yet, how, precisely, did my assessment of Thomas Brock's subject contribute to my interpretation of the portrait bust *Sir Henry Tate*? In what way was it correct, artistically, for me to announce that Brock's bust 'embodied fugitive Africana', which I could then appropriate and unmask? Neither Thomas Brock nor Henry Tate were under a legal compulsion to consider the ethics of the sugar 'supply chain' because the import or trading of slave *produce* had not been subject to prohibition by British law since the abolition of the 'imperial preference' Sugar Duties in 1846–1854. As Huzzey (2010) reported, from then onwards, Britain's constitution, steeped in the ideology of Free Trade, considered such questions as a matter for private conscience.

In the early 21st century this began to change as, in August 2014, the Home Office Minister for Modern Slavery and Organised Crime, Karen Bradley, clarified the legal position: in 2016, a European Union directive would for the first time compel employers of more than 500 people to report on human rights issues in their supply chains. (Home Office, 2014). During my project though, it was not apparently an offence for a British company to import slave-produced goods and until 2016 they were not obliged to report such knowledge if they did.

In the 1890s the role of Tate's portraitist Brock, as it was understood by both men and their social circle, was to represent the knighted philanthropist and art collector as noble and dignified. Brock's attitude to Bartle Frere and Queen Victoria, both of whom pursued openly aggressive, violent, acquisitive polices against African peoples, suggested not that the artist was amoral or indifferent to his subjects' behaviour, but that, on the contrary, he accepted the moral authority of the British Empire as *absolute*. In a statement published in *The Times* newspaper on the day before the initial unveiling of the *Victoria Memorial* in 1911, Brock shared his deferential and loyal opinion of the monarch, 'I felt that she was just and that she sought the truth *always* and in *all* circumstances' (Brock, F., 2012 L2948) [my emphasis].

To my astonishment though, this was not a character assessment which Brock had based on any form of acquaintance or intimacy, because the man who, whilst she was still alive, portrayed Queen Victoria on 'more occasions than any other artist' (Brock., F., 2012; 2309)

never actually met her. His monumental and also his intimate representations—from the millions of coins (which, in 1893, he had designed) to the colossal statues—were all based on photographs that he did not himself execute. This too was a fact that testified to his virtuosity (ibid). I learnt from Brock's stated beliefs about his absolute faith in her that if the Queen or her representatives such as the Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister, endorsed and justified an action or a person (like the ennobled Sir Henry Tate 1st baronet or the High Commissioner Sir Bartle Frere) then Brock would regard that action or person as absolutely noble and good, automatically.

Because he undertook a commission for the controversial Frere, I had every reason to believe that even if Brock had known that Henry Tate's supply chain included slave produce, and if he was assured of its legality by the Queen's Parliament, he would have accepted the commission to portray the baronet. So, possibly, Brock was not attempting to hide or mask Tate's supply chain by *deceitfully* portraying him as noble and dignified: it was likely that he was completely *indifferent* to questions of trade because the social system in which he had absolute faith, (the imperial monarchy) instructed him to be. His only concern was how to encode the dominant hegemonic 'truth' that Sir Henry Tate was a dignified noble man—which he did by portraying Tate's facial likeness as belonging to a calm, still, contemplative, alert, well-dressed, well-groomed individual. By representing such a coded appearance of Henry Tate, I thought Brock believed he was representing his nobility. Indeed, Brock believed that his life's work was to represent (that is, to symbolise) the abstract quality 'nobility'—and because for him the artwork *Sir Henry Tate* represented that particular noble man, then it was simply another particular and iconic embodiment of the general, abstract, artistic concept: 'nobility'.

So, for the purposes of my unmasked Africana methodology, *Sir Henry Tate* could be described as fugitive Africana because contrary to corporate denials, it was possible, even probable that the sugar baron had indeed profited directly from the immediate products of African slave labour in Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico or Surinam—based on the testimony of his business associate David Martineau and also, of his industry journal *The Sugar Cane.* This was arguably in addition to his exploitation of emancipated African-Caribbean waged labourers in the British West Indies—who were compelled to produce sugar cane in competition with the cheap, slave produce that was flooding the British market (Forster, 1869). These, I considered to be Africana elements of Tate's narrative identity as a social actor.

I also thought that, like his industry colleagues, Tate concealed and sort to deflect attention from this aspect of his identity. It was this concealment that I considered to be the masking of his 'Africana' identity. The 'masked' Africana then, were actions which formed a hitherto

unseen or little known 'fugitive' strand in his biographical narrative. By becoming an element of his identity, fugitive Africana became embodied surreptitiously in Henry Tate's person. In some senses this embodiment was literal: 'Africana' profits paid for the food he ate and for the bedding and clothing which kept him warm and rested. In that sense, fugitive Africana would have become one of his bodily conditions of existence. This is not to say that he would necessarily have ceased to exist without it, but rather it meant that to remove fugitive Africana from a plausible account of Henry Tate's existence would mean explaining in detail why and how the Liverpool sugar refiner and grocer had avoided trading in ubiquitous slave produce.

From my critical reading, I thought of fugitive Africana as having existed in Henry Tate's person in several ways: as a condition of his bodily existence by providing economic sustenance; as a condition of his psychological existence by becoming a part of his subjective will and memory; as a condition of his social existence by enabling to him function as a plutocrat; and, as a condition of his ethical existence because, being secretive, it enabled a hegemonic conception him as noble. Like other kinds of personal experience, fugitive Africana 'belonged' to him and so became one of his properties.

For viewers of artworks about him who were aware of this aspect of his biography, fugitive Africana, like other kinds of inner, unseen identity, could be embodied or symbolised by representations of Tate—even if the creator of the representation did not know about this unstated aspect of his identity. In her research, meticulously documenting how London's public statuary was replete with images of furtive slavers—such as Sir Hans Sloane, founder of the British Museum—the historian Madge Dresser remarked that:

> *The meanings of such monuments are not set in stone but can be subverted and transformed. Statues may be petrified personifications of the past, but audiences and associations change. (Dresser, 2007; 164)*

In that sense, Brock's iconic representation of Henry Tate had become subject to my oppositional decoding, so that, as a signification, it was now iconologically dependent on my knowledge of a different representational system (my interpretation of Tate's biographical narrative) that empowered me to think about his iconic representation in a particular way.

When Thomas Brock began to sculpt his representation of Sir Henry, the western, Academic system of artistic representation that he was encoding into the work was coming into question —partly from European artists like Paul Gauguin and Pablo Picasso, fuelled by their interest in African and Asian artists and whose works, in turn, symbolised the value of alternative systems, and which, entered Europe as booty from conquests by men like Frere. Additionally, semioticians like Charles Pierce and Ferdinand Saussure had already sought to clarify the

logical ways in which representation itself was a tricky phenomenon—a series of arbitrary, symbolic, or else, iconic and indexical signs, for which, meaning was governed by intricate codes and systems of perception (Chandler, 2007).

From my perspective, Brock's *Sir Henry Tate* symbolised 29 years of fugitive Africana because I did not accept the hegemonic, encoding system, which constituted his sculpture as symbolic of absolute nobility, and which, also, had not been challenged, specifically, by the museum. Nevertheless, the question, which I needed to answer was, how might I best represent that 29 years of exploitation through my own artwork? *Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate—whilst Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza confer*, and its sister works, constituted my early attempts to answer that question. However, through the process of creating that work, including the critical readings which I have documented, I felt sure I had also facilitated the future development of my critical practice.

CONCLUSION

11.1 Critical readings and truth claims about unmasking artworks

I have documented, through this research project, three experimental assignments intended to make new artworks that existed in a critical relationship to other, specific, existing, canonical artworks and also, inherently, in a critical relationship to the ways in which those already existing artworks had been produced and contextualised by the disciplinary, discursive practices of artists, critics, historians and curators.

In recounting these complex unmasking activities, I have attempted to codify my studio practice, making it clear that 'critical reading' was a key constituent element of my four-stage creative methodology. In my first experiment, which culminated in the production of my painting, *The Rescue of Andromeda*, I was assisted greatly by the prior investigative work of the art historian Elizabeth McGrath, who traced the 'symbolic annihilation' (Gerbner, 1972) of the Ovidian, black, Ethiopian Andromeda by most (though, not all) white, visual artists. However, in the documentation of my critical reading, I have also sought to demonstrate how, in those instances when there had been a dearth of investigation by critically engaged art historians, I was able to construct my own counter-iconologies for canonical artworks. So, in my chapters on *Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu,* and also on *Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate: Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza confer*, I documented the extent of my critical readings into the iconologies of Sargent's *Study of Mme Gautreau* and Brock's *Sir Henry Tate,* respectively. These critical readings, which re-examined the practices of artists, sitters and patrons, and also interrogated the contextualisations produced by art historians, critics and curators, enabled me to reimagine the lives of subjugated and resistant Africana people, whose exploitation had been erased symbolically, or else, celebrated implicitly, through the production of portraiture that was 'ideologically white' (Babb, 1998).

In practice, these readings empowered me to make a series of explicit and critical truth claims about my artistic intentions and outcomes for the mimetic appropriation of canonical imagery. So, for my painting, *The Rescue of Andromeda,* I was empowered to produce, what might, arguably, have been the first, documented, 'black Andromeda' figures in contemporary, British fine art. Consequently, those works, through their iconography and titles, engaged my practice in a critical dialogue with the British canon's complacent acceptance of the symbolic erasure of an imagined, black Andromeda—as embodied by the multiple *Andromeda* artworks in Tate's collection, which had been constituted as ideologically white. Then, for my two paintings titled, *Yaa Asantewaa inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu*, my critical readings enabled me to make the truth claim that Sargent's *Study of Mme Gautreau* had been produced in consequence of Mme Gautreau's experience of, inheritance from and complicity within the system of white

supremacy—as established in the Louisiana labour-camp system of enslaved and racially tyrannised African-American workers. In consequence, I believed that my appropriation of recognisable postural and sartorial motifs from Sargent's work, which were synthesized into paintings that celebrated the African, anti-colonial heroine, Yaa Asantewaa, could be presented plausibly as attempts to unmask, critically, the normalized, hegemonic encoding of white privilege and Africana subjugation embodied by the Tate collection artwork. Furthermore, by synthesizing those motifs through the representational figuration of my African-British sitter, Risikat Donkor, my history paintings, could be claimed plausibly as a détournement of Sargent's own, well-documented practice of producing white masks for the black skin of his African-American models—whom the painter had derided in his documented interactions with other whites. Finally, for my work *Maria Firmina dos Reis Reads to Henry Tate: Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza confer*, I was empowered, by my critical reading, to make a truth claim about my appropriation of imagery derived from Sir Thomas Brock's iconic *Sir Henry Tate*, which was displayed at Tate Britain, the art institution founded by Henry Tate. I thought that to produce a figure representing *Sir Henry Tate,* which was situated alongside figures and motifs that I linked, symbolically, to the enslavement and resistance of Africans in the Americas was a reasoned, ethical response to my newly discovered understanding that Tate himself, in contrast to the institutional consensus was, very likely to have been a significant and direct exploiter of slave-labour produce during the 29 years he spent in the trans-Atlantic, sugar refining business before the 1888 abolition of Brazilian slavery.

In addition to creating new artworks through the Africana Unmasked methodology, I also attempted to translate my studio experience into a learning resource for postgraduate art students, which has been documented in Appendix 3. I had hoped that, by introducing my methodology into the art college curriculum, I would empower artists to take the kind of investigative and rigorous approach to the interpretation of canonical artworks and institutions, which would enable them to produce more resilient, critically engaged work. The art students reported that they had gained educational benefits from my approach, and I was encouraged to believe that this would be translated into their own methodologies, particularly with regard to the appropriation of motifs and imagery from already existing artworks.

11.2 Methodology and Identity

Through the process of documenting the implications of my methodology in Section I of this thesis, I found it necessary to address theoretical questions, such as: what was meant by the geopolitical terms 'British' and 'African' in an artworld context? And also, how had ideological whiteness and imperial ideology functioned in the history of western portraiture? By working through the layering and intersection of disciplinary and interdisciplinary

discursive formations I discovered that in the artworld, 'British' and 'African' denoted discursive categorical objects that were historically subject to seemingly arbitrary delineations assigned by institutions and officials in order to police, constrain and extend the boundaries of their disciplinary domains. Elite museums, publishers, curators, historians, critics, artists and academics had ascribed and withheld these national, transnational, racial and ethnic identity categories according to an interplay of the rules of power. Consequently, with regard to two portraits of the same sitter, both made almost concurrently in France by an Italian-born artist: one had been been canonized as a British artwork, and the other as an American artwork. Of course, there were valid, historical reasons for both ascriptions, and far from thinking such categorical oscillations had been 'wrong' per se, I thought, rather, that it indicated the instability, ambiguity and political contingency of the categorisation processes themselves. This sense of recognising misrecognition in the museum's working seemed to correspond with the argument proposed by Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh that:

> *[w]hile the classificatory systems and practical institutional technologies of people and things are all still in place, their explanatory power is nearing exhaustion. (Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh, 2013; 245)*

However, in trying to contextualise my artistic relationship to Sargent's work, I also discovered that, for some commentators—such as Babb (1998), Rosenthal (2004), Cooks (2011), Stephenson (2005) and Berger (2005)—the illusions of 'naturalism' in much post-Renaissance, western portraiture could be plausibly interpreted, as not simply the reification of gendered and class-distinct social constructs, but also, as the reification, recuperation and idealization of a dangerous, mythology of white, racial purity. Both of these developments in my thinking, about art, race and nation, suggested that transracial artistic appropriations were, possibly, more significant socially, and more important critically, than I had realised at first. As a person with a profoundly transracial and transnational personal and social heritage, perhaps this too, had been my own normalized lacuna—which had meant that I was at first, perhaps, somewhat indifferent to the latent, political impetus to segregate according to one category of artistic identity or another. I realised that, in my practice, I might need to be more attentive to the severity with which the racializing gaze attempted to fix, constrain and dominate artistic identity.

11.3 Artistic engagements with Tate as an institution

Let me begin by stating that despite all that I have said here, I had much admiration for those aspects of Tate, as an institution, that were useful, and enjoyable. Meandering through the halls and galleries, contemplating clever, disturbing or hypnotic artworks was, and will probably remain, an experience at times wondrous and enchanting. And, as I have mentioned

earlier, I would not want to cast unfounded aspersions on the subjective sincerity of those charged with fulfilling its humanistic mission. Certainly, with regard to the history of its artworks, and what they represent, I have not intended, through my critical practice, to be needlessly vindictive about how we handle, in the present moment, the legacies bequeathed us by our predecessors. And, it might seem that by focussing so relentlessly on the legacies of slavery and colonialism, I have not been 'even handed' in my approach to artworks and the individuals and institutions connected with them. However, I have had to bear in mind that, through these assignments, I have had to challenge, in the first instance, my own complacency. In encountering the genial portrayals of Henry Tate, the athletic heroism of Perseus, and the stylish bravura of Mme Gautreau, I was not at all immune to the interpellating allure of their imperial grandeur, to the mythology of security offered by their continuing, undying, reassuring presence. After, all that is what the artists' undoubtedly intended—to project a seductive brand of beauty, endurance and nobility. But, I would not say that challenging myself to look beyond this surface was a form of guilt-driven self punishment, a way of undoing my own intoxication with the charm of their art. Rather, I intended that Africana unmasked would be, also, a way of reflecting on the meaning and context of my practice. What values, connotations and systems have been implicated in my work? Perhaps, also, through the outcomes of these observations and readings, and in a realm only reached through a severe critique, new, productive moments of solace, inspiration, contemplation or enjoyment through art might also be produced.

In his 1984 book, *Making Myself Visible*, Rasheed Araeen decried what he saw as 'a white monopoly of the British art scene' claiming that 'the public bodies have proved themselves incompetent in discharging their duties' (Araeen, 1984; 91). Pointing out the inequity in which British people of African and Asian heritage in their millions paid taxes to support institutions like Tate, but were systematically excluded as individual, practicing artists, he demanded:

> *not as charity or special favour but as our right and share, full recognition for all our activities. We must have the right to be shown in all official exhibitions and galleries, without any delay and excuse. (ibid).*

Shortly afterwards, in 1987, The Tate Gallery accessioned its first works by African-Caribbean, British artists into the collection, bringing to an end the ninety-year period of exclusion. Since that dramatic reform, the museum had continued to modify its relationship to Britishness, and to its own sense of Africana identity, by acknowledging the challenge proposed by Araeen and becoming more engaged in a more diverse curatorial, artistic and public discourse. This declaratory embrace of diversity, outlined in documents such as the *Tate for All* booklet produced in 2013 (Serota, 2013), has resulted in many more 'firsts' (and seconds), involving

artists such as Chris Ofili, Ellen Gallagher (b. 1965) Hurvin Anderson (b. 1965) and Meschac Gaba—as well as in discursive events that I have taken part in, such as the 2015 symposium *The Black Subject,* when I presented elements of this research project as *Andromeda Africana* (Donkor, 2015). But, although the kind of exclusionary practices identified by commentators like Eddie Chambers (2012) and Araeen (1984) appear to have been substantially eroded, I also agreed with Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh that the institution needed to "get out more often' in order to enter other networks, as well as giving permission for other networks to operate in the museum' (Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh, 2013; 245).

Clearly, this research project has not focussed on the reform of Tate's curatorial, staffing or audience diversity polices, but has been primarily about documenting, analysing and developing my own critical practice in relation to artworks in the British collection. Nevertheless, because of the museological and art historical element to my practice, as outlined in my critical reading methodology, I have observed aspects of the museum's functionality which have at once hindered, but also, to some degree, necessitated this project —and which could be transformed for the better in order to facilitate critical art practice. One urgent 'network' transformation would be to rhizomatically widen participation in the museum's website. I use the term 'rhizomatically' in the sense of a rhizome being a distributed multiplicity of 'lines of flight', as proposed in 1980 by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari:

> *A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles. (Deleuze, 2004; 8)*

This would allow for a greater diversity of interpretive communication not just *from* the museum, as the all-knowing centre, *to* everybody else as passive recipients, but in a more even exchange in which the public were empowered to 'talk back' and also to discuss with one another within, through and beyond the parameters of the digital institution.

Tate Collectives, which encourages young people to engage with the museum, provided one example of what this might look like with their tumblr site (Collectives, 2015). However, that was still hosted on a separate domain, kept at 'arms length' from the digital museum. What I would propose is a social media model, hosted within the museum's domain, and readily accessible to view and contribute to. Such a project would enable tagging, comment, and visual reinterpretations (including 'détournements'), as well as new forms of intervention, that could sit alongside and within core elements based on the collection and 'official' discourse. I make these comments as a direct consequence of my experience following the convoluted trails during the critical reading phases of my methodology. For example, given that Singer Sargent continued to be a high-profile artist, and also that *Madame X*, the sister painting to the

Study of Mme Gautreau, continued to attract public interest, it ought to have been possible to learn directly through Tate's website about his sitter's intimate connection to the Africana history of Louisiana, rather than through the more circuitous route that I had needed to undertake. And, once I had produced my own interpretation, it should have been possible to have contributed those to the museum website. Similarly, it ought to be possible through Tate's website to engage in an open discussion about Turner's 1798 *Andromeda* sketches in relation to Ovid's Ethiopian mythology (as arcane as such a discussion may have seemed to Franz Fanon—2008; 180). Clearly, a more open engagement with dispersed public interpretations would have resource implications, but it might go some way to addressing the suggestion by Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh that:

> *The most obvious way for the art museum to relinquish the constraint of the historical system of representation is to relocate the development of audiences at the centre of its practices and to work with it on a grand scale. (Dewdney et al, 2013; 8)*

I would suggest that a more heterotopian, multitudinous exchange of discursive objects oppositional decodings and historically resistant subjectivities, integrated through the museum's website, would diminish its hegemonic status and greatly facilitate the kind of critical artistic engagement embodied by Africana Unmasked—because such a rhizomatic project would empower a wider range of knowings and unknowings than could be apprehended through the museum's austerity-era brand of cultural capital.

Perhaps, on a practical level, as an initial experiment, the 'rhizoming' of dispersed discourse could, in the first instance, be inaugurated through the already existent Tate Members system, (although that sub-institution, in itself, implied a kind of clubbish exclusivity). Of course, it would be impossible to predict outcomes for such an initiative (that would be the point), but, in the case of Foster's book, *Tate's Women Artists* (2003), I thought that, if a new edition were to compiled, the author would not, in 2015, have been able to search for 'female artists' on Tate's website and readily discern the information requested. And yet, Tate must have possessed such information to have enabled Foster to write her book—so why was the data-set not equitably distributed, constantly revised, constantly questioned? Of course, it could be argued that enabling artist's biographical entries in the museum's website to be marked by, for example the 'protected characteristics' designated by the 2010 Equalities Act (H.M.G, 2010), would simply reinscribe the kind of redundant representational models that potentially inhibit a fuller social engagement. However, I would assert that the position, in 2015, was still characterized by an 'isolation of aesthetic modernism' (Dewdney et al, 2013; 245) in which the public were not yet empowered to access Tate Online in a way that enabled them to learn, for example, how many of Tate's 3,500 represented artists were women, or black, or based in

London—or else, to participate in constituting or discussing such information. And, I would argue further that such a monopolizing position by the institution might facilitate patterns of exclusion, unaccountability and privilege behind a veil of curatorial propriety.

Perhaps, by 'turning itself inside out' (ibid) along such lines, Tate might provide greater stimulus for dispersed artistic creativity—a departure point for new collectives of artistic involvement. In 2012, the then Director, Penelope Curtis, considered that Tate Britain had a 'troubling name' (Curtis, 2012), although given the context (the catalogue for the *Migrations* exhibition), this seemed directed more at the 'Britain' rather than the 'Tate' element. Consequently, as I reflected on how this project had facilitated critical practice, I thought of all those avenues that I hadn't traversed, such as, for instance, making a design proposal for an *Artist's Collective to Rebrand Tate*[47]. Had it been implemented, the collective would have been a forum enabling artists to discuss whether the historical, but furtive, association of the word 'Tate' with the Liverpool refinery industry's documented, mid-19th century dependence on slave-produced sugar was an appropriate way to announce and embrace creative diversity and popular education. Such unrealised proposals were, perhaps, indicative of my own immersion in a more introspective, individualistic, mode of working that, whilst having its own rhizomatic qualities, had also eschewed more overtly participatory, discursive artistic practices in favour of the quietude of a painter/photographer/draughtsperson's studio.

Although, it was also possible that my inability to initiate such an artistic project was just a symptom of exhaustion from the work of 'trailing Henry' through his many webs of trade, philanthropy and self-mythologising. As I sat, writing this thesis in my south London studio, I was acutely conscious of my spatial proximity to those psycho-geographic webs: in order to visit my local park—perhaps to clear my head as I wrestled with Hall's theory of oppositional decoding—I would walk 10 minutes in one direction and pass Henry Tate's Park Hill mansion. Then, if I needed to buy fresh bread from the Brazilian delicatessen in order to fuel my weeks spent painting *Maria dos Firmina reads…* I would walk 10 minutes in the opposite direction and pass Henry Tate's mausoleum, standing at the far end of the local cemetery (Pearson, 2002; 26). Glancing through the window of my supervision meetings at Chelsea College of Art, I would see across the street, the vast halls of Tate Britain. Surrounded by such a wealth of significations of power, and yet, to have embarked on a solitary quest to envision a past that could never be recovered, never repaired, never understood—and to have then tried to crystallize that quest within the amber resin of a thin film of linseed oil, seemed, in retrospect, to be almost the definition of a Quixotic, artistic self-mythology. Nevertheless, I had thought

47. I was aware that the very word 'brand' had deeply traumatic implications, given the context.

it artistically productive and worthwhile because I had demonstrated that the four phases: critical reading, observation, appropriation/synthesis, and reflection—when consistently applied in order to unmask fugitive Africana—did facilitate a critical practice.

11.4 Critical reflections on painting as a methodology

By choosing to work in a figurative idiom, a painter is confronted by two, apparently distinct, research questions: 'how to paint?' and 'what to paint?'. However, in a critically engaged, appropriationist methodology, such as Africana Unmasked, those questions become much more closely aligned. This is because of the necessity to, on the one hand, produce motifs from existing artworks that are recognisable and, on the other hand, to recontextualise those motifs so that they operate in a new, iconographical composition. In order to sufficiently effect those propositions, and in order to experiment productively with those new realities, a certain degree of mimesis is required, and a certain degree of visual plasticity is also required. In the assignments documented in this project, I found it necessary to utilise the mimetic power of photography alongside the plasticity of drawing, painting and digital design to produce my new artworks. In the current, digital era, the combination of all of these techniques is becoming ever more indistinguishable.

In each of my three assignments, I found that the decisive weight given to the specific technical facility of each method varied considerably. So, in the first assignment, concerned with the Andromeda myth, I gave a great deal of precedence to digital design. In his installation project, *Robot Bodies* (2001), Keith Piper considered the way in which science fiction produces close analogies to racial slavery, with its mechanical variations on the stereotypes of the 'dangerous', 'docile' and 'duplicitous' machines and cyborgs corresponding to tropes of the 'field slave' 'house slave' and 'mixed race' human chattel (Piper, 2015). And certainly, working with the computer-generated, virtual bodies which I created for my *Andromeda, Nanny, Cetus and Medusa* artworks, I began to notice myself becoming increasingly uneasy with the controlling aspects of that technology. And also, in ways that were reminiscent of Barthes concept of photography's 'analogical plenitude' (1977), I found that the digital plenitude of my virtual creations was becoming difficult to manage effectively. What, I mean, is that the ability to produce literally hundreds of variations on the same theme with just a modicum of programming also produced a problematic of editing—what to include, what to exclude. In some respects, then, the physical slowness of mimetic painting, offered a way of reconsidering my figuration and representation in a more measured and deliberative manner. I don't mean to imply that painting is always slow, or that digital work is always fast—these are entirely contingent on aims and means. In fact, in making, *Andromeda,*

Nanny, Cetus and Medusa, I was confronted again[48] with the reality that, in some respects digital practice could be very slow. Even if my low-budget computer and software were not a factor, the infinitely adjustable parameters of virtual camera angles, virtual lighting, virtual focal lengths, not to mention all of the other design parameters (setting the colour of fingernails, or a human iris for example), meant that to construct even one image could be just as demanding on the artistic labour of visual thinking as would have been necessary using paint or other 'real' artistic tools. And, in that respect, digital design, was not always as advantageous in terms of the efficiency of artistic work as it might seem. I do not, by those remarks, intend to disparage digital or other mechanical technologies, I am simply reflecting on the complexity of our interaction with them, which must inevitably have a strong psychological, socially mediated element.

So, without wanting to eulogise or romanticise the work of painting, which, (like digital, photographic and drawing work) resists being reduced to any essentialist criteria, I did find that, despite its drawbacks, there were outcomes, perhaps distractions, that were produced in association with my formal concerns, and which, perhaps, resided (for me, at least) in the element of surprise. As a methodology, unmasking Africana necessarily required that my new artworks required strong resemblances: even if they were only half-glimpsed or half-remembered, they needed to be demonstrable. And, in addition, the methodology also required the production of degrees of synthesis—of juxtaposition, contrast, overlaying, and blending marks and motifs that were encouraged to populate themselves within and beyond the bounded jurisdictions of the framing device.

However, in attempting to produce a sufficient degree of appropriation and synthesis, I inevitably produced glitches, accidents—perhaps they were failures of nerve, or moments of abandon. Perhaps, they were attempts at seduction, ways of compensating for the austerity that was at work in the main signification of my critical assignments, or perhaps they were moments of regret, sorrow, or even apology. In that respect, I was often (probably, always) conscious of those Proustian minutiae of painting, which Elkins (2000) suggests gives a work much (if not all) of its communicative force: such as the decision to change the size of a brush, or to alter an angle of view, or to replace a pigment or rework the consistency of a medium. The almost inevitable sloppiness of painting, its capacity to sometimes function effectively through accident as much as through purpose could, in that respect, have offered some respite from the potential for relentless austerity produced by the rigours of mimesis.

And, perhaps, too it was that sense of escape from rigour, from that certain remorselessness

48. I had been using Computer Assisted Design since the early 1990s.

of representation which seemed so inherent in the mechanical deliberations of my camera and computer, that swayed my judgement in executing these assignments to veer more insistently towards painting as the project progressed. That is not to say that painting could ever be, necessarily, a universal metaphor of freedom, or resistance—there would be far too many contingencies, historicisms and counter-arguments for that to be remotely arguable (although, in cities like São Paulo I have witnessed a proliferation of street painting, that indicates a desire for documenting the gestural release that is formidable). Perhaps it is just that, in particular instances, with particular constraints, painting is not only necessary (because of its synthesizing plasticity) and sufficient (because of its mimetic potential), but also, for some—because of education, interests, means and temperament—it is irresistible.

11.5 Critical practice beyond Tate's British collection, Africana and Britishness

In Appendix 1, I have documented two, new artworks through which I demonstrated the productivity of the Africana unmasked methodology when implemented in relation to existent artworks that were outside Tate's collection of British art. One new unmasking painting, called *Nanny of the Maroon's fifth act of mercy* (2012), was facilitated by an oppositional decoding of *Jane Fleming, later Countess of Harrington*, by Sir Joshua Reynolds (c.1778–79). And, I synthesized Reynold's motifs with a portrait of my ever patient sitter, Risikat Donkor—in order to produce a representation of the Jamaican heroine, Nanny of the Maroons. My other new painting, *Harriet Tubman en route to Canada*, decoded the fugitive Africana embodied by Caravaggio's, *The Martyrdom of St Matthew* (1599–1600). In fact, the *Harriet Tubman* painting also appropriated figurative motifs from a Tate British Collection artwork[49], but I did not consider that element of my composition to be a specific, unmasked Africana motif. Because these two further unmasking assignments were related to works outside Tate's British art collection, I did not afford them a central status in my thesis. Instead, I regarded them as practical evidence of the transferability of the unmasking methodology into other domains. And, this, formal, transferability of the process also raised the possibility of facilitating critical artistic practice by unmasking a multitude of fugitive identities, perhaps (for instance), related to gender, sexuality or disability—particularly in institutional contexts which seemed to mask such identities with a doubling of force, such as in the hegemonic relationship of Britishness to Africana produced by Tate Britain. Such potential projects and proposals, were though, not part of this thesis, as they were beyond the parameters I had initially set.

My intention to facilitate a 'critical practice' through the unmasking Africana methodology was fulfilled by making artworks that had, I hoped, contributed to a developing movement of

49. Henry Bowler's painting, *The doubt: 'can these dry bones live?'* (e.1855)

artistic, critical engagement with the western canon by practitioners constituted within the privileged, subjective space produced by the emancipatory creativity of the African Diasporas. However, my use of the word 'facilitate', rather than 'produce' was deliberately precise. I came to consider that the specific critical reading, observational and appropriative/synthesizing moments, which I have documented in this thesis, were the foundational nodes in what I intended to become an expanding nexus of artworks that explored the histories, myths and legends associated with Andromeda, Mme Gautreau and Henry Tate. However, in addition to those three initial phases of the unmasking process, I also integrated a fourth phase, that of critical reflection. And, in my critical reflections, I was compelled to consider what conditions of contingency were necessary to evaluate the production of critical practice through my *Andromeda*, *Yaa Asantewaa* or, *Maria Firmina dos Reis* artworks. However, irrespective of my immediate conclusions, I did think that the process of their creation had empowered me to continue trying to unmask fugitive Africana, in the expectation that I might produce new artworks which could challenge, increasingly, my understanding of what it means to exist in this world. To paraphrase Fanon, 'art, make of me always a person who questions'.

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APPENDIX 1:

CRITICAL UNMASKING EXTENDED BEYOND TATE'S BRITISH COLLECTION

A.1.1. Nanny of the Maroons' fifth act of mercy and Reynolds' Jane Fleming

The central intention of *Africana Unmasked* was to facilitate critical practice by unmasking fugitive Africana in Tate's British collection. However, during the course of my research, I discovered, when working on my *Queens of the Undead* cycle, how the methodological model of unmasking was also applicable to artworks outside of the Tate collection, and in the following remarks, I will explain briefly this extended use of the methodology in practice.

Fig. A1.1: Left: Donkor, K., (2012) Nanny of the Maroons' fifth act of mercy. Oil paints on canvas. Right: Reynolds, J., (c.1778–79), Jane Fleming, later Countess of Harrington. Oil paints on canvas (Photograph courtesy of Bridgeman Education).

In sub-chapter 6.3, I recalled my intention, whilst working with Fehr's *The Rescue of Andromeda,* to invoke the legendary, historical figure, Nanny of the Maroons, as replacement for Perseus. In documenting that phase of the unmasking process, I introduced Nanny as a military leader in the Maroon forces fighting the British in 18th century Jamaica. In 2012, I produced a painting, titled *Nanny's of the Maroons' fifth act of mercy*[50] (see fig. A1.1, above), which invoked Nanny through a variant form of the unmasking process. Whilst researching imperial, artistic contemporaries of Nanny with which to signify her historical epoch in accordance with the *Queens of the Undead* methodology, I found Joshua Reynolds' compelling portrait of Jane

50. The painting was first exhibited with the shorter title, 'Nanny's fifth act of mercy' (Jackson, 2012; 17)

Stanhope, Countess of Harrington (née Fleming; 1755–1824) which he completed in c.1778–79. I learnt, through critical reading, that she and her family had extensive political-economic links with the British, slave-holding system in the Caribbean—her stepfather, Edwin Lascelles (1713–1975), was born in Barbados to an English, slave-holding family and used his vast, slavery-derived fortune to build the Harewood House palace (Smith, 2006; 124). In 1780, the countess visited Jamaica with her husband, General Charles Stanhope, 3rd Earl of Harrington (1753–1829)—it was her wealth, inherited from her father, which provided for his regiment (Colburn, 1829; 540) (Chadwick, 2014; 27). In Reynolds' later painting of Jane's husband, *Charles Stanhope, third Earl of Harrington, and a Servant* (1782), completed after their return from Jamaica, a young, anonymized, African boy was pictured attending to the Earl.

However, in the portrait of Jane, there were no overt Africana motifs and so, I decided that, given her family connections to the enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean, her funding of British armed forces in Jamaica, and her visit there, Reynolds' portrait—unlike with that of her husband—tended to have, for an uninformed viewer, the effect of masking those Africana elements of her biography. So, I decided to ask my sitter, Mrs Risikat Donkor, to affect the posture of Jane Fleming, with the intention that, by painting a figure which resembled Reynold's work in dress and bearing, but who was of recognisably West African heritage, I would unmask the fugitive Africana embodied by Reynold's image. In order to symbolize this trans-racial, trans-national metamorphosis with greater clarity, I painted my representation of the Risikat/Nanny/Fleming costume in the colours of the Jamaican national flag—given that Queen Nanny was declared a national heroine by the former colony in 1976 (Gottlieb, 2000). The other two figures in the painting were appropriated and synthesized from William Hogarth's *Marriage á la Mode: 5, The Bagnio (*1743) which was held by the National Gallery.

The inscription of historically resistant subjectivity in my new artwork was produced by a pictorial narrative in which, instead of symbolizing, ennobling and glamourizing one of the principal military enforcers and social beneficiaries of Britain's imperial, slave-holding system, (as embodied by Countess Harrington), the postural, bodily and dress motifs of Reynolds' work were used, instead, to re-imagine one of the chief architects of resistance to enslavement, Nanny (Gottlieb, 2000). However, Fleming's portrait was owned by the Huntington Library and Art Gallery in San Marino, California and was, therefore, not part of Tate's national collection. This meant that my work could not be regarded as unmasking fugitive Africana in Tate's British collection and so could not form a principal assignment of this research. Nevertheless, I have included *Nanny of the Maroon's fifth act of mercy* in this appendix as an an example of how the methodology of unmasking Africana was comprised of formal elements which were readily transferrable to artworks in other collections.

A.1.2. Harriet Tubman en route to Canada—Bowler and Caravaggio

Fig. A1.2: *Left: Donkor, K., (2012), 'Harriet Tubman en route to Canada'. Oil paints on canvas. Centre: Bowler, H., (e.1855), The doubt: 'can these dry bones live'. Oil paints on canvas (Courtesy, The Tate Gallery). Right: Caravaggio, (1599–1600) The martyrdom of St Matthew. Oil paints on canvas. Photograph by Donkor, K., 2011.*

Another artwork from my *Queens of the Undead* cycle, for which I also used the Africana unmasked methodology was my 2012 painting, *Harriet Tubman en route to Canada*. For the figure of Harriet Tubman, I did not ask my sitter, Mrs Risikat Donkor, to affect the entire posture of Henry Bowler's figure in *The doubt: 'can these dry bones live'* (e.1855). This was because, unlike in some of my other appropriations of bodily motifs from artworks, it was necessary only to synthesize the anguished facial portrait of my sitter with the posture and dress of the appropriated Bowler motifs. To complete the figure, I represented Bowler's work closely, and also added imaginary elements, such as completing the skirts and shawl. My reason for using Bowler's work though, was not based on the Africana unmasked methodology, but on the *Queens of the Undead* methodology. That is to say, '*The doubt…*' was selected for appropriation because it was painted contemporaneously with the military activities of Harriet Tubman when she led several groups of African people escaping American enslavement. Tubman guided the refugees, assisted by Underground Railroad abolitionists, through the dangerous territories of the U.S., to find refuge in Canada—where the British Empire had abolished chattel slavery in 1838.

The figure in Bowler's painting also held a certain resonance because of its invocation of resurrection and death, as well as of Christianity: Tubman, was not a doubter, but a fervent believer, and she was posthumously recognised as a saint by the Episcopal Church (Armentrout, 2000; 529). My painting, though depicts a desperate encounter, when Tubman, threatened a straggler with death, rather than leave them to be recaptured and thereby betray the rest of the group (Humez, 2006; 236). For the figure of the straggler, I appropriated the

pose with which Caravaggio painted the apostle in his *The Martyrdom of St Matthew* (1599–1600). In 2011, I had learnt that Caravaggio based his painting on the narrative of St Matthew in a famous Medieval book called *The Golden Legend,* written and compiled in 1260 by Jacopus de Voragine (Kitson, 1969; 93). In the narrative, St Matthew was evangelising in Ethiopia when he was slain during a church service, yet, nonetheless, Caravaggio had represented the congregation as 17th century, white Romans (including a self-portrait). Caravaggio, therefore, conducted a similar operation to that which had become commonplace for Andromeda, in that he had erased the black, African identity of the legendary figures in favour of a white, racialized figuration. By translating the Matthew figure into this Africana tableau vivant, which was similarly replete with signs of martyrdom, I was inscribing into the painting my own resistance to the symbolic annihilation of Europe's ancient, multi-racial literary history.

APPENDIX 2: TEACHING 'UNMASKING' TO ART SCHOOL MA STUDENTS

Having described, in the main chapters, the practical and theoretical principles of 'masking' and 'unmasking' Africana in Tate's British art collection, I will now set out the experimental process by which, I discovered whether and how my methodology and findings could be usefully translated, beyond studio and exhibitionary practice, to also offer a pedagogical benefit.

I begin by describing the key questions, aims, context and background of this stage of the research. I then outline my specific methodology, before proceeding to detail the data gathering process. In the last section, I set out my research data and explain how it informed my conclusions.

The questions that I set out to answer were, in the first instance: What might be the benefits and challenges to students and teachers of introducing, into a higher-education, Fine Art curriculum, knowledge about my research and practice-led engagement with Tate's fugitive Africana? One, initial concern was whether an enquiry into Africana—which must, inevitably, raise politically charged, sensitive questions about race, nationality, empire and resistance—would cause a group of art students to find such questions too difficult or controversial to engage with productively?

Data Analysis: Outline And Method

I carried out this phase of the research by designing, teaching and reflecting upon a Fine Art higher education curriculum module called '*The Africana Unmasked Seminars*'. The module consisted of four, taught sessions for twenty-two, Masters degree students enrolled on the Fine Art programme at Camberwell College of Art and Design, part of the CCW Graduate School at the University of the Arts, London (UAL). Based upon the criteria outlined above, my seminars offered students new cognitive tools for critical reflection about the role of African ethnic, national and racial identities in contemporary fine art theory and practice. In tandem with that educational aim, the seminars' research purpose, within the overall 'Africana Unmasked' research project, was to test and learn about the art educational utility of practice-led knowledge about Tate's fugitive Africana.

The initial seminars were held and recorded in the spring term of 2012. One month later, interviews and a round-table discussion for students were recorded to reflect on the process. The administrative process of embedding this 'action research' project into the curriculum of the MA programme was facilitated and observed by Professor Rebecca Fortnum, who was at that time the Course Leader for the MA Fine Art, as well as Professor Kate Hatton, who ran

the UAL research project known as RAS (Retain-Achieve-Succeed). The RAS project was a long-term, umbrella research programme that sought to explore disparities between white and black British student's degree classification outcomes at UAL (Hatton, 2013). I proposed that the Africana Unmasked seminars might shed light on possible curriculum bias by offering an alternative to hegemonic, Eurocentric interpretations of art practice and theory. After completing the seminars and writing my initial findings, I invited Professor Fortnum to join my doctoral research supervision team. Aware that I intended to utilise data from the research in my PhD, as well as in the RAS project, Professor Fortnum, Professor Hatton and I structured our roles in order to delineate my original authorship of the seminar programme and research. This delineation of roles enabled me to maintain the academic clarity that, the original seminar content, specific research methodology, delivery of the seminars and the report writing, were created by myself.

Because of its participatory nature, the methodology of this aspect of my research was aligned with the 'participatory action research' (PAR) model of inquiry. In particular, my process chimed with principles outlined by the Columbian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1925–2008), which he made during his Plenary address at a conference in Atlanta, in 1995.

> ** Do not monopolise your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques, but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers.*
> **Do not trust elitist versions of history and science which respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them.*
> **Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs, and arts for action by and with the research organisations.*
> **Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals. (Fals Borda, 1995)*

The choice of Fals Borda's PAR as a model might have seemed slightly idiosyncratic, because his techniques were designed to enable sociologists to interact with disadvantaged communities in an egalitarian and empowering way. This meant that my own research practice as a painter teaching about a prestigious museum to international Masters Degree Fine Art students at an elite university in London seemed distant, contextually speaking, from the kinds of rural peasantry which had formed the basis for Fals Borda's research techniques. In consequence, I think my initial attitude was more focussed on an egalitarian, rather than an empowering outlook. By egalitarian, I mean that I intended to respect my students as practicing artists with valid working methods and artistic theories—so that my listening to their ideas would inform a constitutive element of the seminars and of my research.

However, I also felt, with regard to PAR, that because the seminars occurred on an actual MA course, they constituted a type of 'real-life', social intervention, rather than an artificial, purely experimental one. Students, teachers and researcher would be jointly engaged in directly reshaping one aspect of a live education course, knowing that such action would have significant personal and professional consequences for all. Yet, almost as soon as the seminars commenced, it became clear that 'empowerment' through participation was as much a feature of the research as the notion of egalitarianism.

The students were very conscious that, in challenging the hegemonic mythologies of art history, as embodied by the museum collection, we, as a group, were participating in the constitution of a 'counter-narrative' to an elitist, exclusionary version of art history. They also became aware that, in the emphasis on discourse and mutual listening in this strongly diverse group, we were engaging with a wider spectrum of culture than the standard 'western', white, and male-centred concepts usually associated with Fine Art, particularly in the context of the museum. Although I assumed full responsibility for the research, I did not monopolise my knowledge, but from the outset, I shared with the students what my research purposes and interests were, and acknowledged their role in the process.

In terms of how I organised my research material, my enquiry had both qualitative and quantitive elements. By 'qualitative' I meant that the seminars considered aesthetic and cultural values (which, I deemed to be 'qualitative') associated with contemporary Fine Art practice, teaching and learning. Therefore, I recorded and assessed the students' attitudes and awareness, as well as reflecting on the teachers' experiences (that is, the in-class experiences of myself and Professor Fortnum). However, quantitative data was also recorded and evaluated, and, in the category of 'quantitative', I included such numerically delineated data as the number of participants involved in specific activities and, with regard to their participation and reflection, the numbers of their affirmed statements about specific subjects. By analysing both the qualitative and quantitative data, I was able to observe specific patterns and features.

I identified two, primary research findings. Firstly, all of the responding students believed that their participation in the seminars had significantly developed their understanding of the role of ethnic, national or racial identity in Fine Art. Secondly, the teachers (myself and Professor Fortnum) recognized, based upon our observations, and the responses of the students, that the teaching of Africana subjects in the Fine Art curriculum did broaden and deepen the student experience. By 'broaden', I mean that, in thinking, metaphorically, of the curriculum as a flat plane of knowledge fields, the seminars added a significant area. By 'deepen', I mean that, in thinking of the curriculum as an opaque, three dimensional body—with both a

dominant surface of visible knowledge, as well as unseen depths of meaning—the seminars empowered students to reveal or critique those deeper assumptions.

Contextual considerations—MAF.A. subject identities

Because the Africana Unmasked seminars addressed a specific educational concern with subject identities in the Fine Art curriculum, I think it necessary to summarise some of the relevant subject identities at play in the classroom during the sessions. The MA Fine Art programme at Camberwell College of Art and Design was established and led by CCW Graduate School Reader in Fine Art, Rebecca Fortnum, in 2009. Her subject position in relation to questions of race, ethnicity and nationality in fine art education was that she was a painter and writer from a predominantly white, English family and cultural heritage. Through her London-based, internationally recognised practice, she had developed links with a globally diverse community of artists.

I was in the first cohort of full-time students on the course, graduating in 2010. My immediate family and cultural heritage included black Jamaican, Akan-Ghanaian, Zambian, Nigerian, white English, Ashkenazi and Welsh people. Rebecca and I were of a similar age with overlapping artistic concerns, including figurative painting and feminist discourse. An example of these shared interests was in the work of the British, African-Caribbean artist Sonia Boyce, whose artwork was the first point of discussion in the seminars. Rebecca had interviewed Boyce for her book, *Contemporary British women artists in their own words* (Fortnum, 2007). My initial proposal to include the Africana Seminars within the RAS programme stated that,

> *Through student feedback and staff reflection, we have identified a lack within our curriculum that stems from a dominating Euro-centric view of art practice, history and theory. This can be alienating to both overseas students and B.M.E. students whose cultural heritage may not be demonstrably recognised and valued. (Donkor, Fortnum, 2011)*

During the first year, all of the course tutors were from a white European, Australian or North American social background and the subjects of their expertise were centred in the art history of white social groups, (whilst tending not to explicitly acknowledge this fact). On the other hand, a significant number of students were from Asian, African, Latin American and African-Caribbean backgrounds, and some were recruited by Rebecca in the knowledge that national, ethnic or racial identity concerns formed part of their research interest.

However, in the following year, staff Euro/white-centrism was reduced when Sonia Boyce was invited to lead a series of seminars, with my own seminars contributing to a further widening of participation. Vong Pahophanit, Lynne Lu and Yuko Kikuchi, (who all have Asian backgrounds), also taught as visiting tutors. The students (including those who attended the

Africana Unmasked series) continued to reflect a global racial, national and ethnic background.

One significance of these artistic social origins for any Fine Art course is that they were directly related to the key concepts of self-expression and identity. (In my conclusions, I provide some information that demonstrates the role of these concepts in the wider Artworld). Nevertheless, the race/ethnicity/nationality of students was not used by myself as a criterion for attracting participation in *Africana Unmasked*. Students had a choice of two sets of seminars to attend and they were both advertised to the students in terms of the subject matter—with recruitment being on the basis of student preference compared to the alternative series of seminars. Consent forms and attendance were not monitored or evaluated on the basis of the ethnicity/race/nationality of the students as I did not think it necessary to include any specific formality about this process. However, students did sometimes explicitly state their sense of identity in discussion. Informally, I would contend that a majority were white British (60%), with a smaller, but sizeable number being from overseas and British minority ethnic groups.

Artistic identity discourses in the introductory seminar

The first seminar was an introductory session in which, I outlined the content of the course and also explained the research process that I was engaged in: particularly the roles of RAS, Tate Britain and my PhD project. I asked for informed consent to use data from the seminars in my research. Of the 21 consent forms given out, all gave permission to record, analyse and publish data—provided the participant's identities remained anonymous.

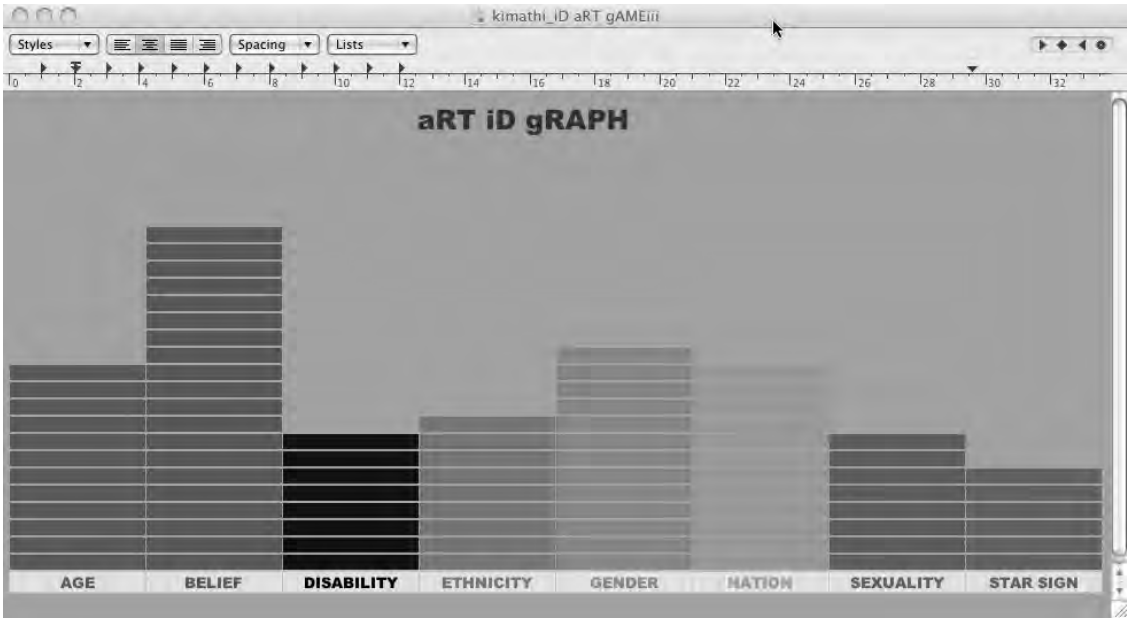

Fig. A2.1: Donkor, K., 2012. Graph indicating number of artists in group of 21 who said that a particular identity category was relevant to their practice. [Screen grab]
The numbers were: Age, 12; Belief 20; Disability 8; Ethnicity 9; Gender 13; Nation 12; Sexuality 8; Star Sign 6.

The rest of the session involved the teachers and students taking part in a game-like process, which I devised and named the *aRT iD gRAPH*. The physical form of the *aRT iD gRAPH* was a projected image from my laptop onto a large screen (see Fig. 6.1, above). The image was of a bar chart with eight coloured columns, each labelled by a category of social identity. The categories were age, belief, disability, ethnicity, gender, nation, sexuality & star sign—set out in alphabetical order, which was the order followed in the seminar.

I asked for a definition of the concept of identity. One participant said it meant, "Who you are, what makes a person an individual. Things like where they grew up, and their ideas." I agreed that, "Yes, every person has their individual identity, we are all unique. But, it can also mean what groups you belong to, what you have in common with people." I said that the labels for the columns were identity categories and we would play to find out which were particularly relevant to our artistic practice.

I asked participants to raise their hands if they thought that age played a role in their practice. Out of 21, twelve raised their hands. I then gave the Age column in the laptop chart a height of 12 units, and the students could see the change onscreen. We discussed Age and art practice — one participant said that, being relatively older, but also new in the field, they believed their work was received with greater scepticism than for younger artists. They felt that, consequently, the way they presented themselves and their work had to be particularly professional. I verbally reflected upon the way in which I understood this remark, asking the participant if I had understood correctly. Reflecting and affirming was a teaching and learning technique learnt during my training as a teacher and adult-education tutor, and which is applicable in higher education discourse. It played an important role in making the seminars effective forums for the exchange of ideas by demonstrating to the participants that their contributions were intrinsically valued for their content by the person delegated with educational authority (myself).

At first, some participants noted their concerns that, being 'human', we all had some relation to each identity category and that artist's ideas about practice might change, perhaps rapidly. I agreed, and explained that the *iD gRAPH* questions were not intended to be determinative of, or judgemental about, the artist's practice henceforth, but simply illustrated to one another the ways in which we perceived our practice to have been affected particularly by a given category.

For 35 minutes we repeated the process of hand raising, amending the graph and discussing each category. The spread of opinion, which I solicited, included those who didn't raise their hands, as I wanted to encourage every voice. The game was a catalyst for a discourse on artistic identity concerns in a calm, even-handed way, without fear of censure. Some

disagreements emerged, but there were no overtly prejudicial remarks about any identity group —simply affirmations, explanations or denials of the importance of a category to each participant's practice. The graph, as a visual measure of opinion, enabled us to appreciate the significance of identity categories to the group as a whole.

Afterwards, when Professor Fortnum and I reflected on the session, she voiced surprise at some of the results, such as the number of artists for whom astrology was important— slightly more than one quarter. She had been aware some artists thought belief important, although was surprised by how many (95%). Also surprising was the percentage for whom disability was significant, which she felt exposed an area that needed more thought about how it was discussed. Rebecca felt that the seminar confirmed her evolving view about the art school experience. At the outset of her career she had thought that having a wide range of tutors created a generally similar undergraduate experience. But she increasingly regarded the identity of the tutors as having a more significant impact on the focus of the course, which might also be related to the rise in student-staff ratios.

I was impressed by the engagement with the game and discussion, as well as the willingness to take part in the research. Until the aRT iD gRAPH, neither I, nor the students had appreciated how empowering was the opportunity to explain and affirm notions of identity important to their practice. The initial comments about identity being synonymous with uniqueness suggested to me that concepts of professional, competitive individualism, which were so embedded in the artworld, were tending to obscure the artists's understanding of their common concerns with identity.

Onsite seminars at Tate: education, museums and identity

Fig. A2.2: Boyce, S. 1987. 'From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born 'Native' Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction'. Mixed media.

Over the course of the next month, the participants, as part of their Fine Art MA course, were required to attend a further three fortnightly seminars at Tate Britain and Chelsea

College of Art (or, else choose an alternative seminar series). They received a timetable outlining each seminar's theme, including the title and maker of an artwork at Tate Britain, and a reading list. About a week before each seminar, I sent them digital files containing the set text.

On the day of each seminar, we assembled on the Millbank steps of Tate Britain, before walking to the artwork. Once there, students were given a presentation about the work's relationship to the theme, followed by a group discussion. This section lasted about 30–40 minutes. After a short break we relocated across the road to a seminar room in Chelsea College of Art and Design. There I delivered a 30-minute presentation with more detail about the theme of the day. Students were free to intervene or ask questions, and, after the formal presentation, we had a more open discussion, which included thoughts on the set text. Each seminar lasted about two hours in total.

The first seminar at Tate and Chelsea was called 'Education, museums and identity politics', and the work featured was, *'From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born 'Native' Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction'* (1987) by Sonia Boyce (See Fig. A2.2, above). It had been on display in the general galleries, but in March 2012 was part of the ticket-entry exhibition *Migrations: Journeys Into British Art* which presented a chronology of British art made by practitioners with a migratory biography. Lizzie Carey-Thomas, the exhibition's chief curator, and editor of its catalogue, (and, who also curated the Turner Prize shows), kindly agreed to give a presentation about the exhibition theme, and the Boyce piece, to the seminar students.

The set text was the 2004 essay '*Double Dutch and the Culture Game*' by the Nigeria-born American artist, educator, curator and writer Olu Oguibe (b. 1964). It explored how artists, particularly of the African Diasporas, negotiated practices of racialization, exoticization and stereotyping in the artworld. Originally written as a catalogue essay for the 2001 *Be-muse* exhibition by British-Nigerian installation artist Yinka Shonibare (b. 1962), it focused particularly on that artist, but also critically contrasted Shonibare's practice with that of the British-Nigerian painter Chris Ofili (b. 1968)—both of whose work was in Tate's collection.

The talk by Lizzie Carey-Thomas was given in situ next to the Boyce work. At first, she described the rationale of the exhibition, focussing on how, from the 16th century, painting in England (later, the UK) had been profoundly influenced by immigrant artists. Then, concentrating on *'From Tarzan...'* she gave an account of how the black artists movement in Britain of the early 80s had proposed the notion of a black Britishness. Situating Boyce as engaged with a milieu, that included Keith Piper and Black Audio Film Collected, she recalled

how unlike an earlier generation of artists, Boyce and her contemporaries did not regard tenets of 'international modernism' as axiomatic, but rather, questioned, played with and 'took apart' notions of modernism. Partly, perhaps, in response to modernist notions of flatness, Boyce had flattened out a range of representational strategies onto one pictorial plane. Carey-Thomas also recalled how some critics, particularly Eddie Chambers, regarded the work of 1980s black artists as successful for embodying concepts of black Britishness.

The students were deeply engaged by Carey-Thomas's talk and elected to spend extra time in the exhibition, before decamping to the University. I was struck by the fact that, after 11 years of formal art education in the U.K., (from GCE through to PhD) this was the first time I had heard a white educator give an account of the 1980s black art movement (although Thomas claimed it was a 'moment' rather than a 'movement'—a point with which I disagreed). Based on my own, subjective experience, this realisation gave me greater insight into the biases and epistemological competences of the white-majority, art education profession. The fact that I'd had to organize the talk myself, tended to emphasise Fortnum's point that the identity profile of educators played a strong role in constituting how art education was delivered to students.

After the conclusion of the museum-based session of the first seminar, we relocated to Chelsea College of Art, which was next door. There I gave an illustrated presentation, which put the origins of Tate in historical context, considered how notions of 'Britishness' were displayed and also, how some contemporary Africana and black identities were exhibited. Student contributions to the discussion included: querying why had I not mentioned Tate's foundation on a fortune derived from the slavery-based sugar trade; and comment on the site's former role as a prison and deportation point. Discussion also centred on the Oguibe text's analysis of African identity in the work of Shonibare and Ofili. Some were sympathetic to Oguibe's critique about Ofili as playing to racial stereotypes of African otherness, whilst others thought that Ofili's self-mythologising was a normal artistic practice. Questions of migration, auto-biography and Britishness in art were raised, with several students sharing personal experiences.

On reflection, both myself and Rebecca felt that the seminar had engaged the students on a number of levels. Carey-Thomas gave the students insight into how museums approached complex curatorial projects. In discussion, students were interested in and animated about the role of identity in art. We both agreed though, that more time should have been devoted to analysis of the Boyce work and that the students would have enjoyed more time in the exhibition. The student questions, which were raised about the Tate sugar fortune and the prison, demonstrated that some participants were carrying out their own critical research into

the political economy of the artworld and were keen to explore the symbolic and practical implications for art practice.

Although, since I had started my study, other people had raised the question of the sugar economy with me, this was the first time it had been addressed in an open forum discussion. It led me to realise that it would be quite difficult to explain why I had addressed The Tate's art historical connections with Africana identities, without considering the role of Henry Tate himself. That, student-led element of the discussion constituted a part of the impetus, which led me to later consider attempting to 'unmask' fugitive Africana in Sir Thomas Brock's portrait bust, Sir Henry Tate, as documented in Chapters 9 and 10 of this thesis.

Second onsite seminar at Tate: decolonising mythology

Fig. A2.3: Donkor, K., 2012. Fine Art Masters degree students at CCW Graduate school visit 'The Rescue of Andromeda', by Henry Fehr at Tate Britain. [Photograph]

Two weeks later, we returned to Tate, this time, to consider British Africana in the realm of myth. The key work was to be Henry Fehr's bronze sculpture, *The Rescue of Andromeda* (1893) and the set text was Elizabeth McGrath's *The Black Andromeda* (McGrath, 1992).

The student group and I gathered around Fehr's sculpture and I asked the students to recount what they could recall about the identity of the Andromeda figure in relation to the McGrath text. Participants said she was an Ethiopian princess whose identity was 'contested', 'ambiguous' 'mythological' and even 'whitewashed'. I related some details about the history of the sculpture itself (which, is not mentioned at all in the McGrath text), as well as briefly recounting the myth of Perseus. I invited the students to hold hands with Andromeda as an aid to emphasise the intimacy implicit in the lifelike, life-size, nude bronzes. I also pointed out

that one irony in relation to the McGrath text was that, in this instance, Fehr's depiction of the princess was literally 'black' in colour—thus foregrounding the distinction between Blackness as a social category, and blackness as a colour. Students asked whether Perseus was white, and, did I think that Fehr's Andromeda had a black racial identity? Other participants commented on late Victorian iconographies: the sexualised Andromeda, who is always nude; and the possibility of Cetus representing 'monstrous' unconscious desire. One student, of Greek heritage, noted that the main literary source, Ovid was just one, Roman, re-contextualisation —amongst many.

Then, we again decamped across the road to Chelsea College of Art and Design, where I gave a presentation about Andromeda in Tate's collection, her presence in art generally, and my own practice in creating the 2011 painting *The Rescue of Andromeda*. My presentation also suggested the possibility of the wider role of the Andromeda myth, its links, for example, with Christianity and popular culture. Students discussed the ways they used mythology in their practice, including their interpretations of imagery in public collections.

Of particular interest was the transformation and translation of texts and imagery through time and across cultures. We discussed how each artist tends to articulate their interpretation of myth according to their own interests, tastes and preoccupations—which were in turn fashioned by the social context, and towards which the new works are directed. This had implications for the projection of contemporary racial identity concerns onto ancient art. Another point of strong interest was the representation of gender identities in art—with Andromeda's subordinated status as a victim, and a recipient of male patronage, contrasted with her membership of the royal elite.

My reflection on the seminar was that the participants were enthusiastic and engaged: there was a sense of awakening about the multitude of meanings available in works, specifically their relationship to questions of ethnicity, race and trans-nationalism. Amongst Rebecca Fortnum's observations, she had felt that students, who had previously interacted with me as an art-historical authority on the seminar subjects, now encountered me as a fellow artist engaged in problem-solving and resolving questions in my process. This allowed them to engage their critical faculties and make connections to their own practices. She noted the energetic discussion around issues of feminism. I regarded this as being positive, in the sense that the discourse around Andromeda had clear connotations related to gender—but I also thought that it might have functioned as a way for participants to deflect from questions about black female identity and inter-racial marriage.

Third onsite seminar at Tate: Africana and materiality

Fig. A2.4: Moody, R., 1937. 'Midonz'. Carved wood. [Photograph courtesy Tate Gallery.]

The topic for the fourth and final taught session was Primitivism; and the key work to view at Tate Britain was Ronald Moody's sculpture *Midonz* (1937) (See Fig. A2.4, above). The set text was the essay *Unofficial Versions* (1991) by the British art critic and curator Guy Brett (b. 1942), and which appeared in the 1991 book *The Myth of Primitivism*, edited by the American-British artist Susan Hiller (b. 1940). It offered a critical re-reading of canonical art history, including of museology, that contested conventional assumptions about the place of Primitivism in western art practice and theory. In particular, Brett highlighted how artists in colonised territories made work that defied imperialist domination, and also resisted primitivist western assumptions about 'tribal' style.

We returned to the entrance corridor of the *Migrations* exhibition, where Moody's massive carving was displayed in a vitrine. I gave a short presentation about the artist's life and work, including how Tate acquired *Midonz*. Much of my information was based on a further Brett text, *A reputation restored* (2003) which appeared in the TATE magazine in 2003. The students discussed the work and, of particular interest was Moody's technique: the head's monumental proportions and stylized, abstracted modelling of features. Attention was drawn by one participant to the use of wood grain, which sometimes appeared to correlate with the sculptured form, perhaps guiding the artist's decisions. It was suggested that this might reflect a concern to align art to 'nature', or to address the relationship between humanity and our

environment. Students noted its distinctive patina, the dark oranges and browns, and the slight sheen of the partially smooth, partially cracked surface. One participant felt it was quite difficult to 'place' the race, age or even gender of the impassive face—thus giving *Midonz* an aura of mystery. I spoke about the contradictions in Moody's identity as a colonial Afro-Jamaican. He gave up his UK dentistry practice to make art in an era (between 1918 and 1939) when 'Modernism' and 'Primitivism' were two dominant avant-garde concepts, and when, also, imperial and racial domination was enforced brutally (by the imperial states), resisted and endured (by Fanon's colonized masses) and enjoyed openly (by the beneficiaries of colonialism). Then, as before, our seminar relocated to Chelsea College of Art, where I gave an illustrated presentation on Primitivism and British art in Tate's collection. The images from the collection, included works by Henry Moore, but I also showed contextualizing art from around the world, and my own work *Elizabeth Rex Lives* (2006). I concluded with some reflections on the Primitivist critique of Boyce's *From Tarzan to Rambo.* (1991)

Our discussion revolved around a number of topics raised by participants. These included, the recuperation of the 'Primitivist' ethos in contemporary ethnographic photography and, the critique produced by a passage from the Brett text in which the British-Pakistani artist Rasheed Araeen (b. 1935) described Pop Art as North American ethnic art. We also considered how artists who appropriated various 'Primitivist' styles, seemed subsequently unsure about their artworld status as 'original thinkers'. A prominent example of this was the moment when, in a 1937 interview given to the French writer André Malraux (1901–1976), Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) first admitted to studying African sculpture before embarking on his 1907 painting '*Les Demoiselles D'Avignon*'.

> *Van Gogh said "Japanese art, we all had that in common." For us it was the Negroes. Their forms had no more influence on me than they had on Matisse. Or on Derain… I understood what the purpose of the sculpture was for the Negroes. Why sculpt like that and not some other way?… They were weapons. To help people stop being dominated by spirits, to become independent. …Les Demoiselles d'Avignon must have come to me that day, but not at all because of the forms: but because it was my first canvas of exorcism—yes, absolutely!… (Picasso to Malraux IN Flam, 2003; 33)*

We discussed how Picasso had spoken of 'the way' some African artists worked had influenced him, whilst at the same time denying any role to 'the forms', and how he, thereby, seemed to have found it discomforting to admit that an African artist had influenced his methodology. In our discussion of the various meanings of the words primitive and Primitivism, I wanted the participants to be clear that the term 'Primitivism' described an artistic concept in which artists sought out purity, difference and origins in the art of the Other, labelled as 'primitive'.

Prominent among participant responses, was the feeling that western anthropological theories denied artistic agency to so-called 'tribal' makers, claiming that such artists made work in naïve ignorance—that they were, in that sense, 'childlike'. There was also a sense of agreement with Brett's critique that some western artists engaged in an exploitative relationship with colonised peoples, instead of interacting with colonised artists as equals with whom they were in dialogue. However, it was also said by one participant that, in the Tate *Migrations* show, although some artists had connections with Africa, their work seemed to have an English sensibility. This remark struck me as representing a Primitivist desire for black artists to perform their 'tribal' authenticity.

Another, important strand to this discussion revolved around the ethics of artistic appropriation and its relationship to primitivism, consumerism and curatorial practice. We finished by discussing the iconological aesthetics of a Henry Moore piece in relation to an untitled, anonymously made Nigerian mask (both were still on the projection screen). I made it clear that I had made the association myself, based on the Moore title *'Large Totem Head' (1963),* and my limited knowledge of 19th-Century West African sculpture.

On reflection, it was clear that the students could see the relevance of the methodology of 'Unmasking Africana' to their own practices. This was particularly true with respect to my invitation to actively critique the iconologies of artworks, rather than accepting at face value either a hegemonic, art historical consensus, or else, the artist's own accounts—both of which were, inevitably, highly mythologized. However, I also felt that, especially for the younger artists, the iconology of Modernism, and its concern with 'origins' seemed to be a discourse from a completely alien world, as far removed from their daily lives as the Renaissance was from Panofsky's.

Data analysis: follow up interviews and discussion

Four weeks after the final taught seminar, we regrouped for an evaluation process. After having individual interviews, we all gathered for a 30-minute round-table discussion. Of the twenty-one seminar students, thirteen (61%) attended the interviews and discussion, which were recorded and transcribed. Students were made aware that, unlike with the seminars themselves, attending the interviews was voluntary, and that data collected from the interviews was solely for the purpose of research, and would not play a role in their course marks.

The six interview questions sought to ascertain student recollection of experience, such as what they remembered learning. Interviewers were free to ask supplementary questions to elicit detail or clarity, or to reflect our understanding of the answers. All but one of the

questions were in the 'open' form, seeking expansive answers, with the last being of the closed 'yes/no' kind. Participants were empowered to formulate the structure of their own responses, with the length, focus, tone and attitude self-determined, rather than researcher directed. This accorded with the participatory action research model proposed by Fals-Borda,

> *"Respect… the knowledge of the researched… communities. …be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them." (1995)*

The transcript produced some 12,000 words of text, which I analysed for patterns and points of meaning and emphasis. I determined my interpretation of the content of each student's response, evaluating and summarising its meaning, and also, I attempted a taxonomy of responses—classifying them into groups of meaning. I then enumerated the sum of similar student responses and attempted to infer significance from this. The evaluative criteria I used to determine the meaning of responses were as follows: relevance of the response to the question; relevance of the response to the seminars; student evaluation of the subject. I identified key descriptive terms such as 'visit', 'Andromeda', 'liked', or 'culture'. I did not predetermine these keywords, but allowed them to emerge from the apparent significance of the student's statements, and also by their re-occurrence.

For example, in answer to the first question 'Why did you choose the Africana Unmasked seminars?', some respondents used terms such as 'new', 'never looked into before' and 'different'. I classified these terms as one class of meaning—the 'new/different' answer. Then, when summarising student responses to this question, I was able to note the statistical significance of that class of answer—was it a majority, or a small amount, compared to other types of answers. I have included summaries of the questions and their answers in Appendix One of this thesis.

Data analysis: Group discussion session

A few minutes after the interviews, we gathered together the researcher/teachers and the assembled student/participants for a 30 minute round-table discussion about the seminars. The purpose was to allow students to make statements or nuances of evaluation that they had not already formulated, either in the seminars themselves or, through the one-on-one interview process. The collective space, with its multitude of informed participants, was an opportunity for a new set of interactive dynamics to function as a catalyst for ideas. This methodology allowed the researcher/teachers to propose more wide-ranging supplementary questions and prompt new student-generated information.

Several students brought new insights into how the seminars addressed questions of race, nationality and ethnicity in art and art education. One participant said that my original

articulation of research interests, namely, the RAS programme had led them to believe that there would have been a more particular focus on the role of black students in UK art colleges. They reflected that, "I thought we might have followed that up more and maybe been a bit more political or socially aware." This sense of hoping to know more about the contemporary racial politics of the art academy and art economy was echoed by other participants, although one warned against the seminars becoming a "self-awareness programme" rather than "educational".

Another major strand of conversation articulated the students' thoughts about the relationship between research, theory and practice. One participant began by saying that, "[although] the Africana is not linked to my heart… I really found it quite helpful for my future research." In this, the student sought to stress the importance of grounding their artistic opinions and evaluations in thorough-going enquiry. This sense of getting a greater insight into the links between practice and theory was expressed by other students, some of whom emphasised the relationship between research and ethical practice:

> *"[the seminars] made me think a lot about where I took my references from and how I acknowledged them, or if I did acknowledge them."*

That the seminars helped demonstrate the importance of taking a critical, informed approach to practice was reflected in the remark that a student had learnt to,

> *"Always question where the material's coming from and who's sponsoring it and not to swallow what you were given."*

However, at this stage, students did not express the conviction that the subject of Africana itself would necessarily find a direct role as subject matter in their studio practice, although one participant thought that their own artist-educator practice would directly benefit.

Summary of the seminar series

The Africana Unmasked seminars at CCW represented an intense period of knowledge generation, dispersal, exchange and participatory reflection, involving multiple actors operating at one of the highest levels in the UK's Fine Art education system. However, in that context, 'masked' or 'unmasked' Africana was a relatively unfamiliar branch of artistic knowledge (in comparison with, for example, feminist discourse, or post-Renaissance art history). Several students cited the newness of the subject area as a prime reason for wanting to attend the seminars, with the largest section, (almost half) stating that newness was the key distinguishing factor of the seminars within the Fine Art curriculum. However, overcoming unfamiliarity, although important, did not fully explain the effectiveness of the seminars as a learning experience.

What was clear, from the *aRT iD gRAPH* in the introductory session, from the student discussion in the seminars and from the evaluation responses, was that questions of identity in art practice and theory were of strong general interest to these artists-in-learning. Students who, themselves, had no direct family connection to, or artistic interest in Africana, drew parallels between the seminars and their concerns with, for example, feminism, class distinctions, or trans-nationalism. Other students, who did express a direct personal relationship with Africana through family or community relations, mentioned this as an important part of their learning experience. Even so, irrespective of their subject-identity positions, student artists regarded their practice as being embedded in a range of identity networks with which, they claimed shared interests.

This finding was unsurprising, in part because identity discourses were deeply embedded in the contemporary Fine Art industry. For world-renowned artists, elements of their subjective identity positions were often implicitly, or even explicitly, connected with their artistic production. Thus, in 2012, visitors to Tate Britain might have chanced upon the large mixed media work by the gay artist duo Gilbert & George (b. 1943/1942) entitled *Hunger* (1982), which was a picture of two men fellating each other. The artist's themselves had, in this instance, placed a celebration of their own 'queer' identity to the foreground in a display at Britain's premiere art institution.

Similarly, Bangladesh-born Runa Islam's (b. 1970) Turner prize display for 2008 at Tate Britain included *First Day of Spring* (2005), a film of a group of rickshaws and drivers in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital. Again, presented with the opportunity to display work for Britain's premiere art prize, the artist had chosen to place her Bangladeshi identity at the heart of her practice. Aligned with such acts of agency by artists themselves, was the tendency of public and privately owned institutions to, almost universally, cite artistic identity as key part of their contextualization of artistic practice. Thus, in 2014, the National Gallery opened a show highlighting German identity 'Strange Beauty: Masters of the *German* Renaissance', whereas *Tate Guide* introduced its solo exhibition for Saloua Raouda Choucair as "The world's first major museum exhibition of *Lebanese* artist…" (Tate, 2013)

The two key questions of concern to the seminar students, 'newness' and 'identity', existed in a particular dialectic in my own mind prior to teaching the seminars. My experience of learning in the UK art education system pointed to a historic lack of interest in Africana as a subject area that hadn't seemed in proportion to the long, intimate and profound artistic relationship between the UK, and Africa and its peoples—although my perception was,

perhaps, impossible to account for 'scientifically'[51]. After all, what would be a 'proportionate' educational account of the role racial enslavement and colonial tyranny had played in financing, facilitating and inspiring British art? However, it seemed reasonable to conclude that a general, perceived lack of interest from academies might have played a role in causing students to cite frequently my subject's 'newness'.

My conclusions were that, teaching about African identity in artistic practice and discourse, amongst a radically diverse group of students did not, if designed in an inclusive, empathetic and academically rigorous manner, have a divisive, alienating effect, but instead had a cohesive, educational effect. This seemed to be because, as Franz Fanon outlined, even the most racialized forms of identity were not 'objectively' essential in the old ethnographic senses of fixity, but were socio- psychological—they were questions of agency, rather than of genetics, chromosomes or innate compulsion (1967). A global group of non-African students and a researcher with African heritage, wanted to learn about Africana not because of an inbuilt urge to affirm mythic ancestral cultures for purposes of self-awareness, but because we chose to further our knowledge about a little understood, but important, aspect of artistic discourse.

I) Why did students choose the Africana Unmasked seminars?

In responding to this first question, student answers could be categorised into three broad groups. The majority expressed a professional interest, in that their reason for attending was because their practice as artists dealt with identity questions, particularly of gender but also of nationality and ethnicity: "It was looking at identity and… my work [has] a strong feminist leaning, so I'm interested in that." (Two of this group were selected by the course director to attend the seminars, when they hadn't expressed a preference.) The next largest group expressed an interest in learning something new: "London's very multi-cultural and so I thought I wanted to find out more about African culture and the mix with British culture." A smaller group expressed a personal connection with the subject matter, such as having a black family background, or a migratory background.

II) Were they what the student expected?

Most students felt that the seminars either met or exceeded their expectations: "My expectations were just to learn something that I didn't know before and that definitely

51. When I used the term 'scientifically', I meant it in the sense of 'falsifiability' produced by the philosopher of science, Karl Popper, who argued that a theory could be deemed 'scientific' if there was a demonstrable way to 'falsify' it, that is to say, a 'conceivable event' that would prove it wrong (Popper, 1963). In fact, it was easy to conceive of events that would decisively refute my perception that the art education system was unfairly ethnocentric. The difficulty lay in marshalling the resources necessary to conduct such experiments as 'appointing more than two, permanent, fine-art professors of African-heritage' (at the time of the seminars, the only two were Boyce and Himid). Despite its seeming neatness, one obvious problematic in Popper's notion lay in the realm of who decides what is 'conceivable'.

happened."[52] They felt that they had encountered new, thought-provoking questions about art and identity, including the dynamics of institutional racism in the artworld.

> *"I feel that I have a slight insight now into a different way of looking at art and the Tate and how all these institutions are run."*

However, one student felt the subject matter, Africana at Tate, had been narrower in focus than they had expected. Some students felt that the seminars could have had more time allocated, either to the discussions, or, to the museum visits.

III) What did the seminars contribute to the Fine Art curriculum?

The interviewee's answers fell into one of two large, roughly equivalent groups. The first group thought that the primary contribution of the Africana Unmasked seminars was in bringing a fresh critical discourse to the curriculum, particularly with regard to consideration of more socially diverse and socially relevant aspects of art. One student remarked, "I don't link African culture with art very often, so that is an interesting thing for me. I think it should definitely be compulsory." The second group felt that the seminars provided a professionally relevant example of critical thinking about art, with some emphasising the depth of research that can be brought to bare on a given subject. "Being a white, British, middle class, female, you don't always think about [Africana in art]".

IV) What did the student think about the way the sessions were structured?

All but one of the students spoke favourably about the visits to Tate, making this aspect of the seminars by far the most remarked upon of all responses in all interviews.

> *"I enjoyed going and instead of just seeing a picture of the black Andromeda, actually going there and physically talking about it, looking at it, touching it and then coming back here and talking about it—I think it's the best way."*

However, some respondents did feel that the visits were too short. The second most numerous response concerned the participatory structure of the seminars, citing how they felt strongly encouraged to verbally contribute to discourse.

> *"It's not like the usual discussion, two or three people talking, everyone took part in it; this was interesting."*

Allied to this sense of a participatory encounter were remarks that noted the relevance of the initial 'aRT iD gRAPH', seen as a necessary preparation to the later events. The third most common response (6/13), which also seemed to point to an increased sense of involvement, mentioned the set texts as an important aspect of the seminars. As well as providing a

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52. Student quotations in this chapter are all presented anonymously to protect confidentiality.

personal resource, the texts also enabled participation in the discourse by encouraging familiarity with the subject matter. Although the information-rich presentations were regarded as a positive element in the structure of the seminars, the sense of informality was also noted as an added motivation to participate.

V) What did the students remember?

The most recalled element of the seminars (6/13) was the narrative, visits, texts and artworks associated with the myth of Andromeda. As well as the question of Andromeda's conflicted racial identity, as presented in the McGrath text and my presentation, students also recounted memories of visiting the Fehr statue and my own painting.

> *"I hadn't questioned the story of Andromeda previously and it triggered, I suppose, curiosity about other established stories and paintings and long-lived legends that I haven't really questioned."*

Of equal weight (by number of recollections) was the discourse on race and empire, with different students referring specifically to the terms 'institutional racism', 'colonialism' and 'indigenous people' as subjects of enduring memorability. "I like the text about… whether beauty can be black or not?" Interestingly, the actual word 'Tate' was only mentioned by students twice in answer to this question, although it was recalled many more times in the interview as a whole, as well as implicitly by reference to artworks seen on site. Aside from the Andromeda works, the next most numerous category of memories was for specific artists or artworks, with Boyce, Shonibare and Midonz all mentioned. Some also found memorable the broader notions of art theory and history memorable, beyond questions of race and nationality, with one student stressing a sense that the seminars were important to feminist discourses in art, whilst another was keen to emphasise their concern with the centrality of a research ethos. "I found it really amazing to start from a painting and dig deep, deep, deep to the roots.". More than a third of students recalled the key texts, while a quarter said they remembered the participatory element of the seminars.

Did the student participate in discussion?

Although the basic form of this question was designed to elicit the closed 'yes/no' type of response, in practice a wider range of answers were given. Overall, two of the responding students stated that they didn't, or probably didn't, participate in discussion—the other eleven all recalled participating. Of the students who said they spoke in the seminars, several said that their level of participation was dependent on particular factors. These included: a desire to listen and learn; a desire to be relevant and original; and confidence with English as a second language. However, some students also stated that vocal participation in the seminars functioned to empower them and raise their confidence.

APPENDIX 3: ART PRODUCED FOR AFRICANA UNMASKED

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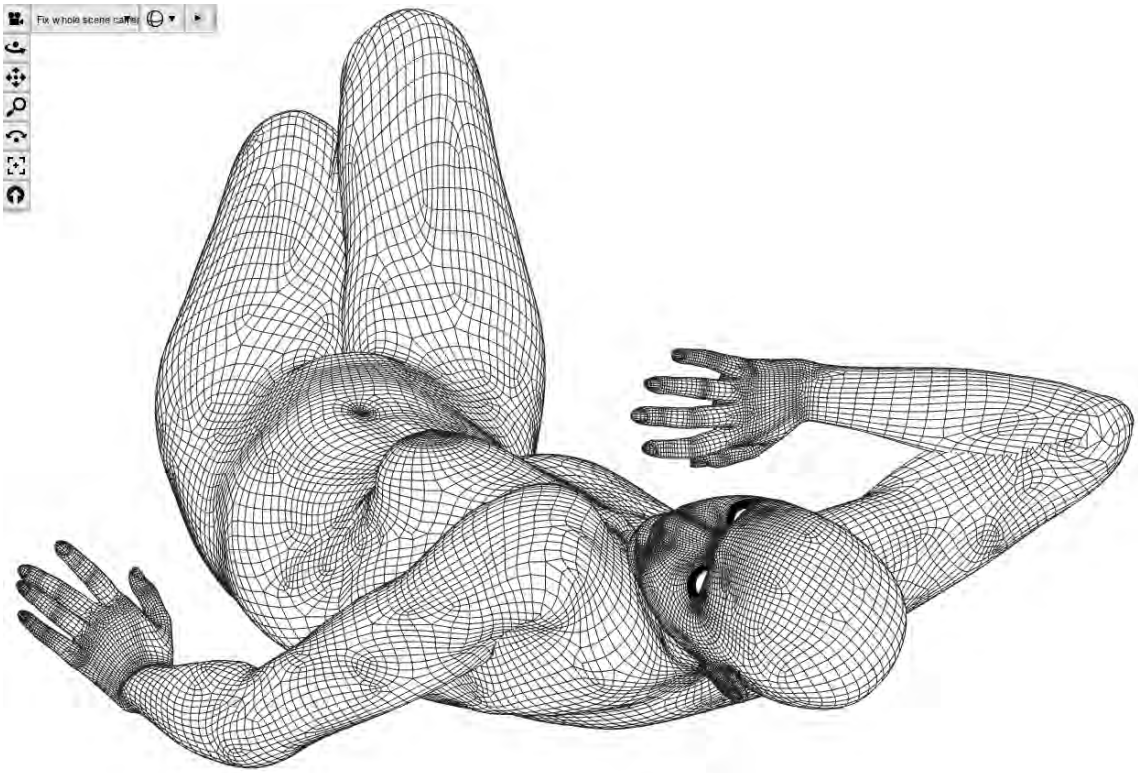
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

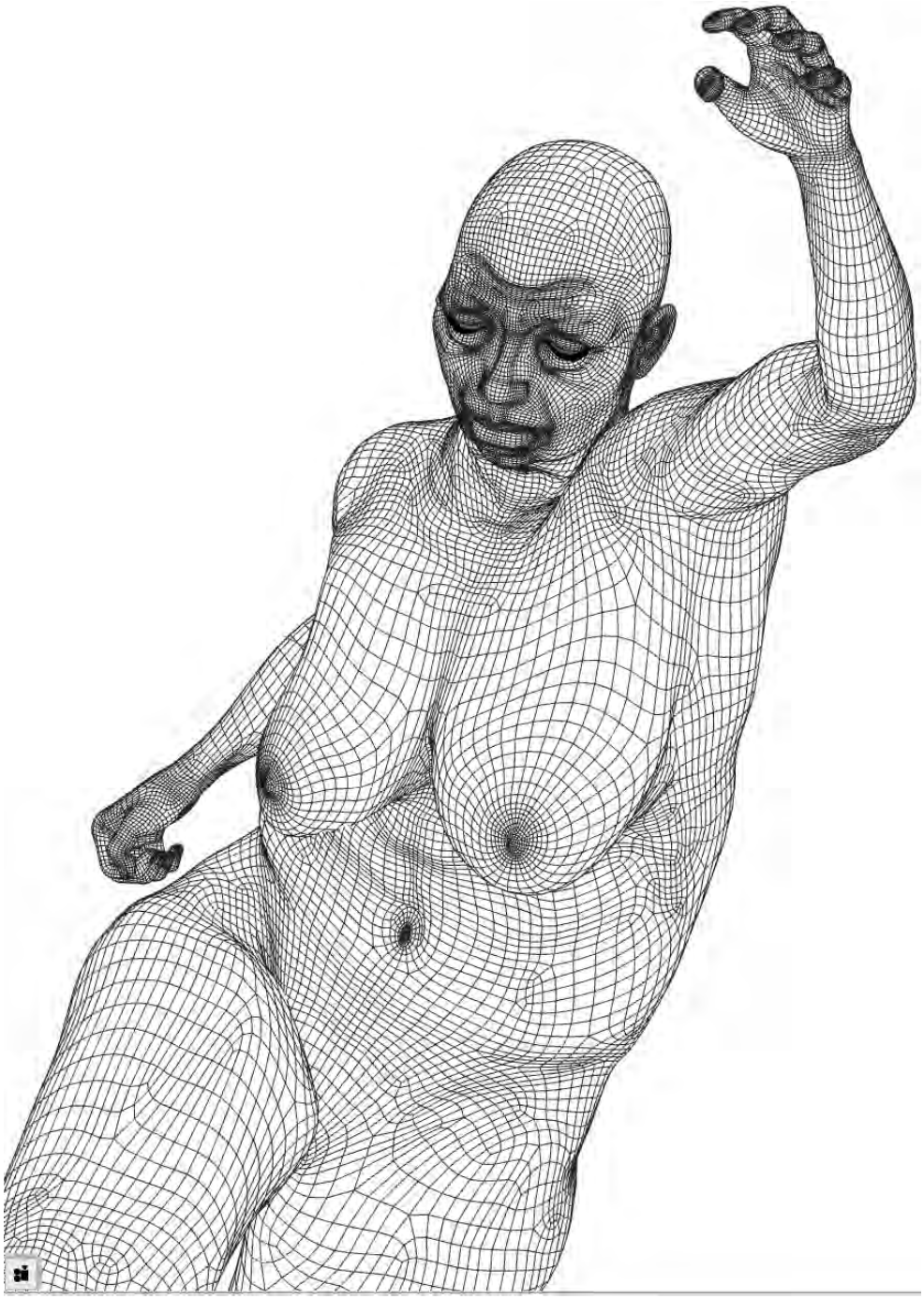
A3.1:. Donkor, K., (2011) *Andromeda, Nanny, Cetus and Medusa.* Digital painting.


SPICY
ADVENTURE

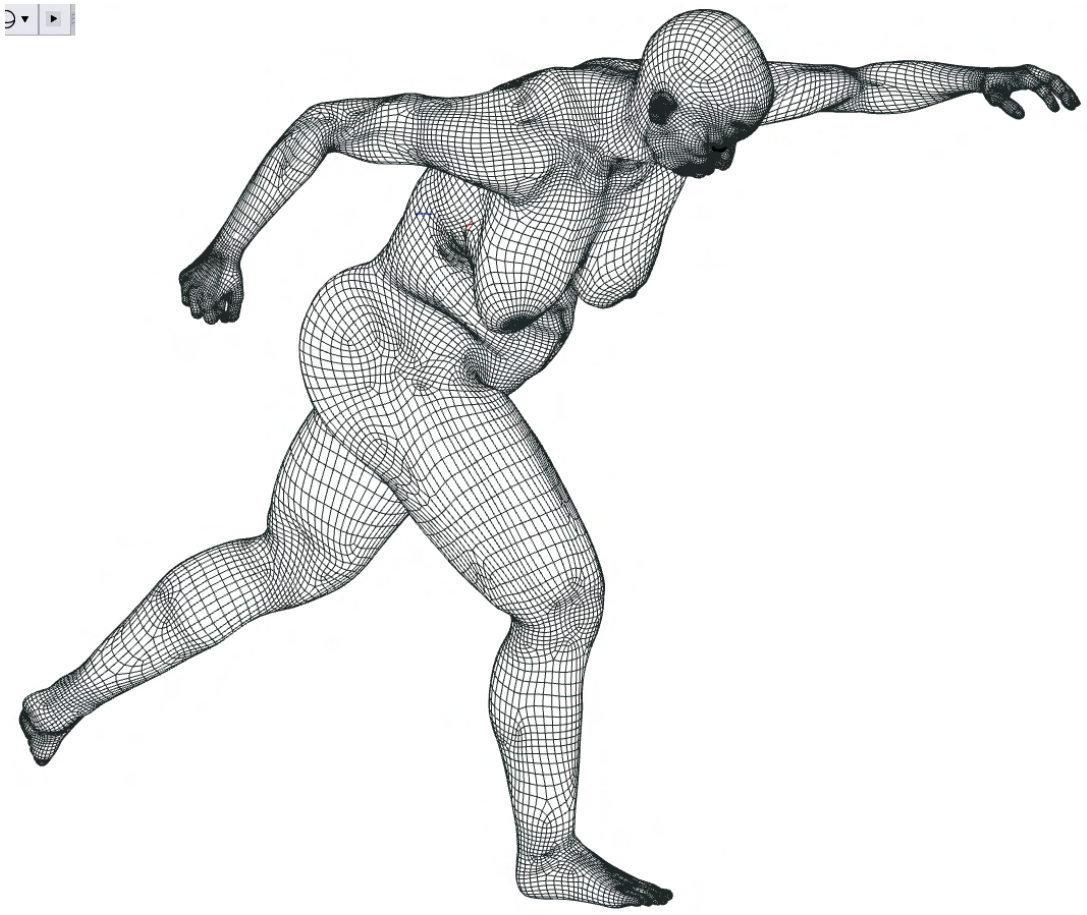
A3.2: Donkor, K., (2011) *The Rescue of Andromeda.* Oil on canvas, 90cm x 120cm.



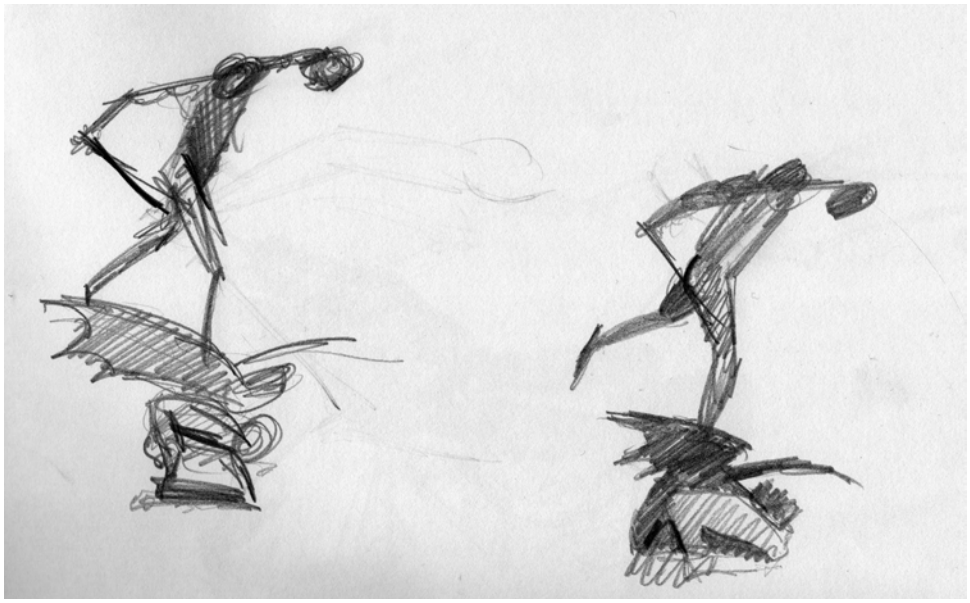
A3.3: Donkor, K., (2011) *Andromeda,* Digital 3D design



A3.4: Donkor, K., (2011) *Nanny of the Maroons.* Digital 3D design



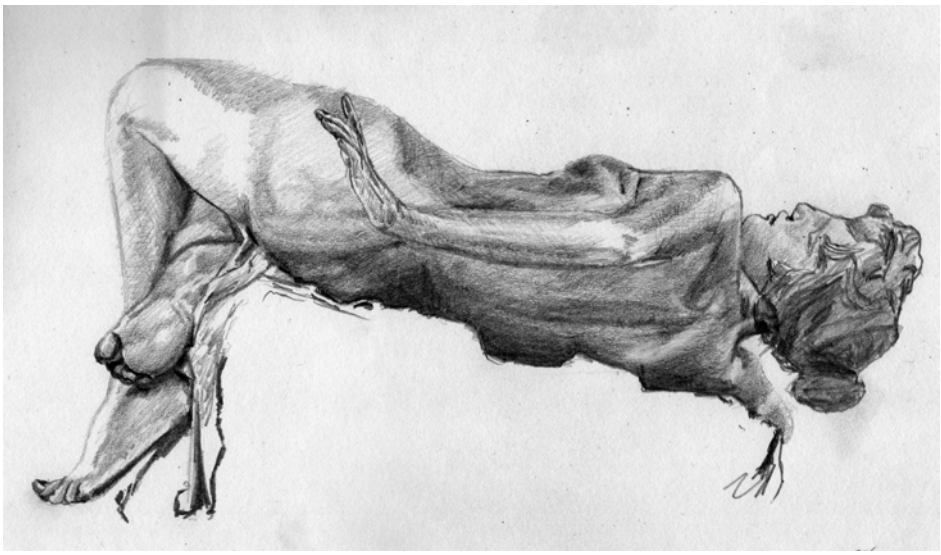
A3.5: Donkor, K., (2011) *Nanny of the Maroons.* Digital 3D design



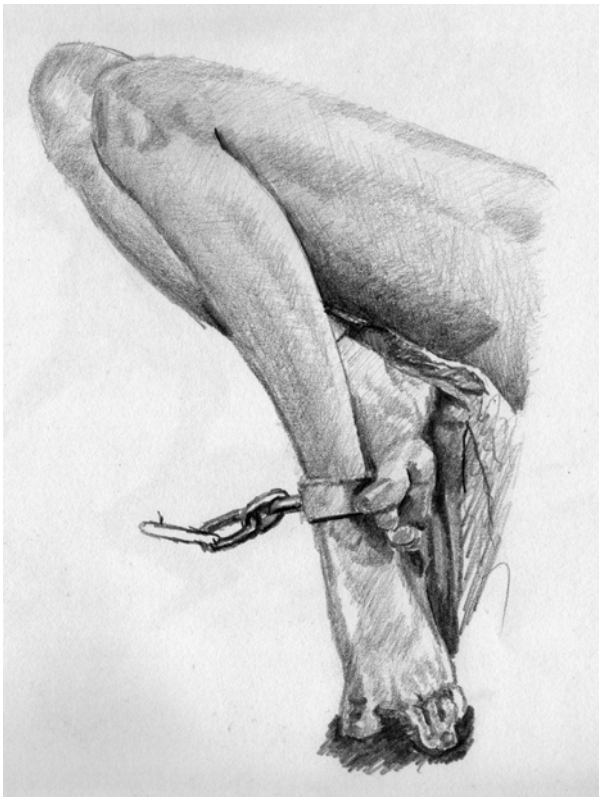
A3.6: Donkor, K., (2011) *Fehr's Rescue of Andromeda I.* Pencil on paper, 29.7 x 42cm.

A3.7: Donkor, K., (2011) *Febr's Rescue of Andromeda II.* Pencil on paper, 29.7 x 42cm.

A3.8: Donkor, K., (2011) *Febr's Rescue of Andromeda III.* Pencil on paper, 29.7 x 42cm.



A3.9: Donkor, K., (2011) *Fehr's Rescue of Andromeda IV* Pencil on paper, 29.7 x 42cm.



A3.10: Donkor, K., (2011) *Fehr's Rescue of Andromeda IV*. Pencil on paper, 29.7 x 42cm.

A3.11: Donkor, K., (2011) *Study of Fehr's The rescue of Andromeda'.* [Photograph].

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A3.13: Donkor, K., (2011) Two s*tudies of Fehr's The rescue of Andromeda'* [Photographs].

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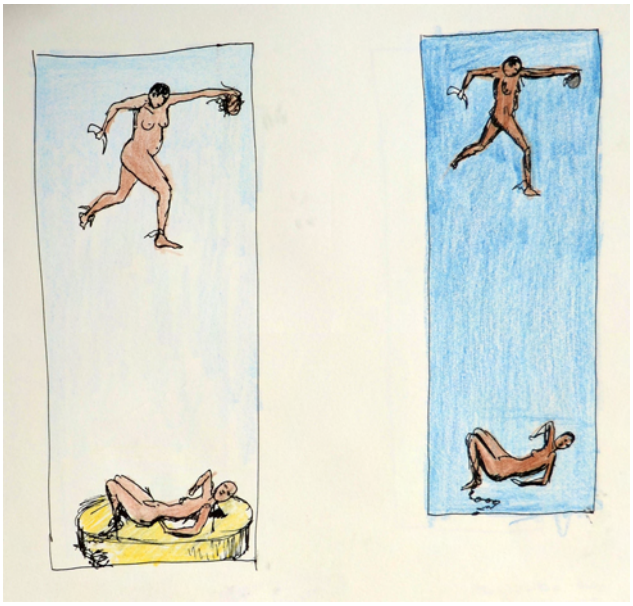
A3.16: Donkor, K., (2011) *Study for Nanny and Andromeda* . Watercolour on sketchbook paper, 29.7 x 42cm.



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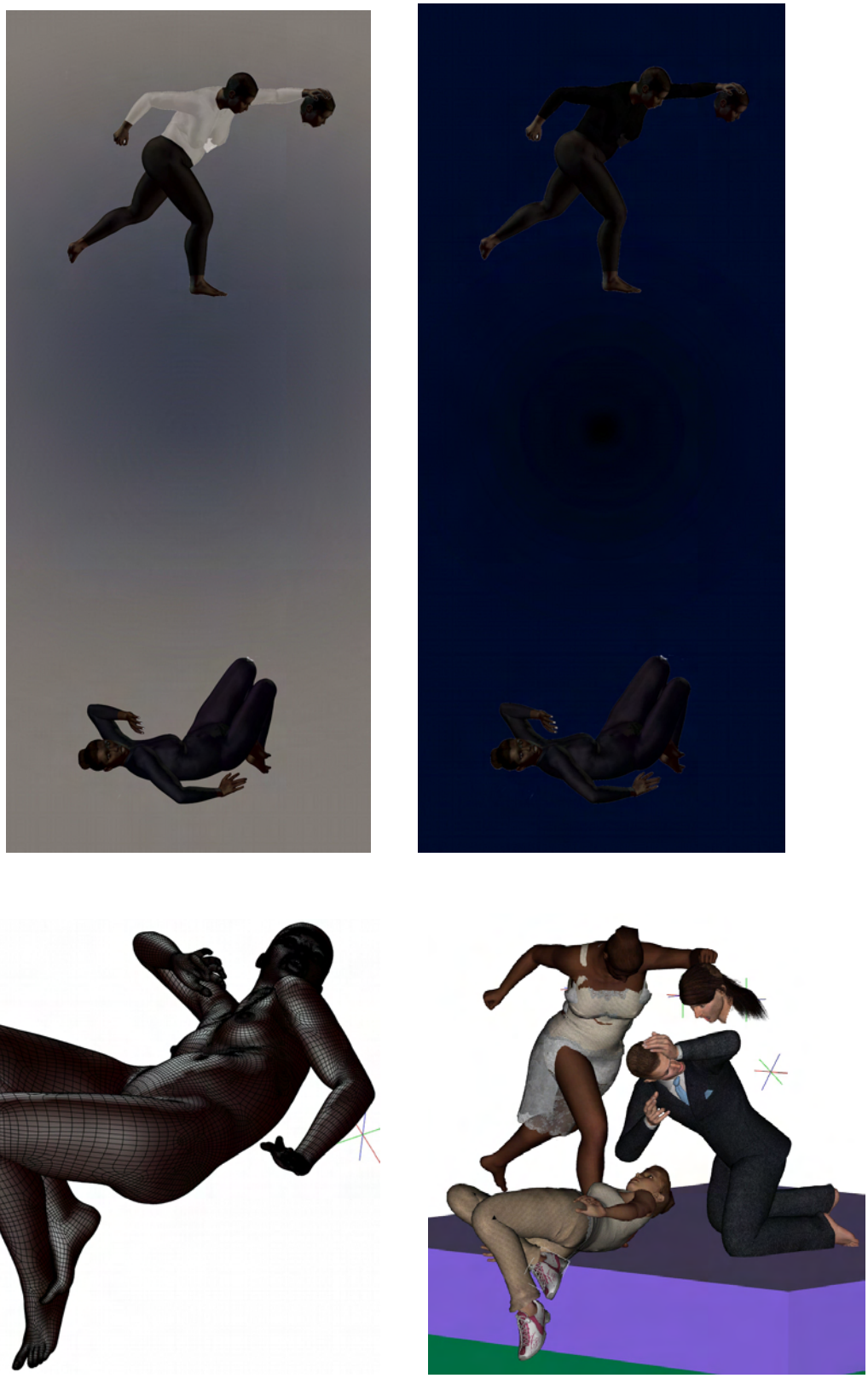
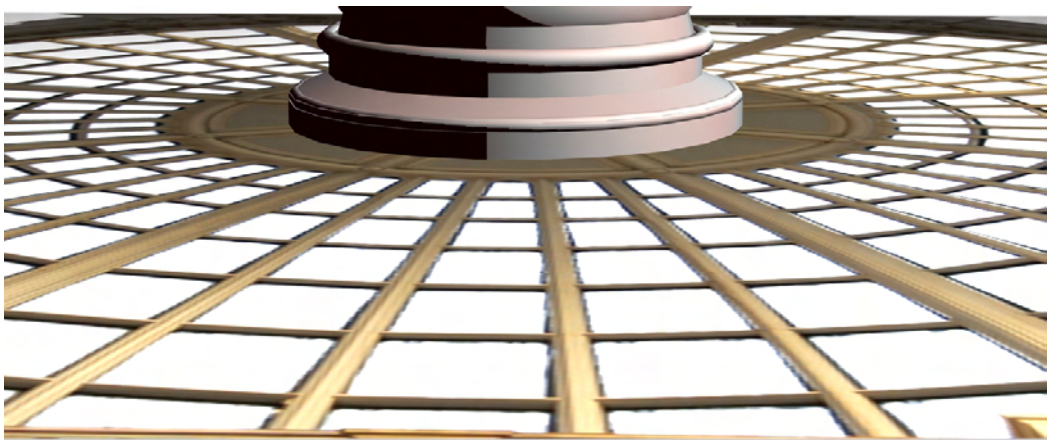
A3.18: Left: Donkor, K., (2011) *Study for Nanny and Andromeda.* Digital design. Right: Donkor, K., (2011) *Study for Nanny and Andromeda.* Digital design.



A3.19: Left: Donkor, K., (2011) Top left: *Study for* Nanny *and Andromeda.* Digital design. Top right: Donkor, K., (2011) *Study for Nanny and Andromeda.* Digital design. Bottom keft: Donkor, K., (2011) *Study for Nanny and Andromeda.* Digital design. Bottom right, Donkor, K., (2011) *Study for Andromeda, Nanny, Cetus and Medusa* Digital design..

A3.20: Donkor, K., (2011) *Study for 'The Rescue of Andromeda' – The Atlas mountains, Morocco*. [Photograph].



A3.21: Donkor, K., (2011) *Study for 'The Rescue of Andromeda'*. Digital 3D design:

A3.22: Donkor, K., (2011) S*tudy for the Rescue of Andromeda – Risikat Donkor.* [Photograph].

A3.23: Donkor, K., (2012) *Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu.*
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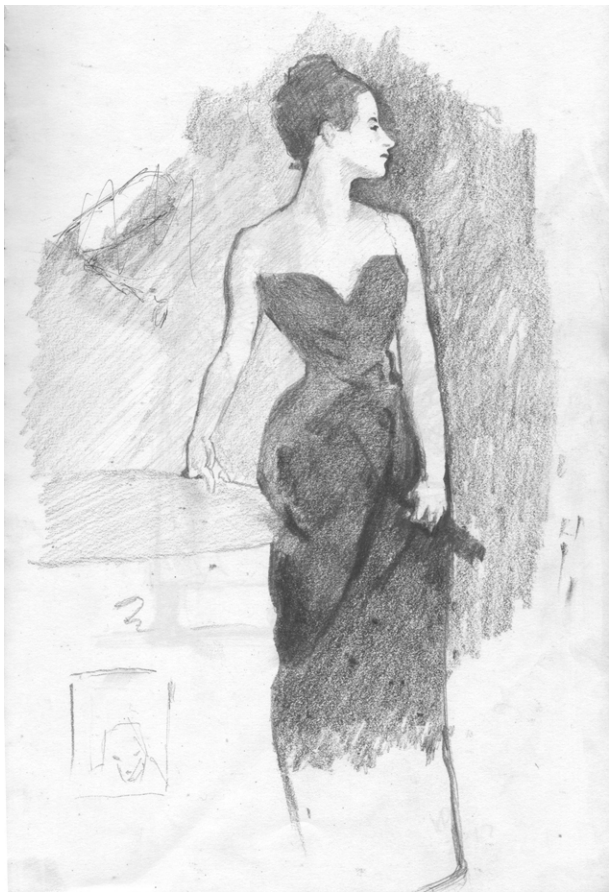
A3.24: Donkor, K., (2014) *Yaa Asantewaa Inspecting the dispositions at Ejisu.*
Oil paints on canvas, 210 cm x 165 cm

A3.25: Left: Anon. 2012 *Perdesoli shotgun*, Photo © Courtesy Cherry's Fine Guns.com. Right: Donkor, K., (2012) S*tudy for Yaa Asantewaa – Risikat Donkor.* [Photograph].

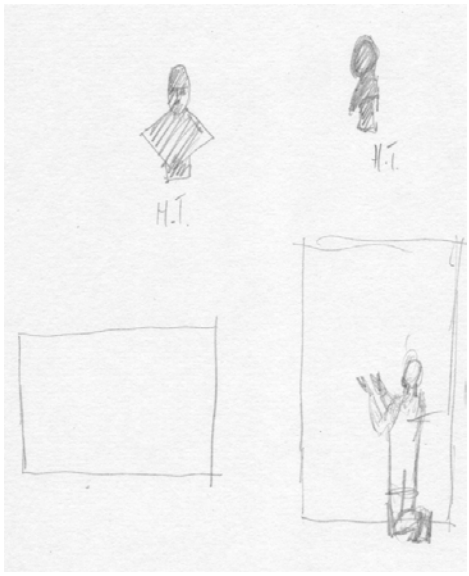
A3.26: Donkor, K., (2007) *Study for Yaa Asantewaa – Kakum National Park, Ghana*, [Photograph].

A3.27: 'Donkor, K., (2014) S*tudy for Yaa Asantewaa – Sargent's 'Study of Mme Gautreau',* [Photograph].

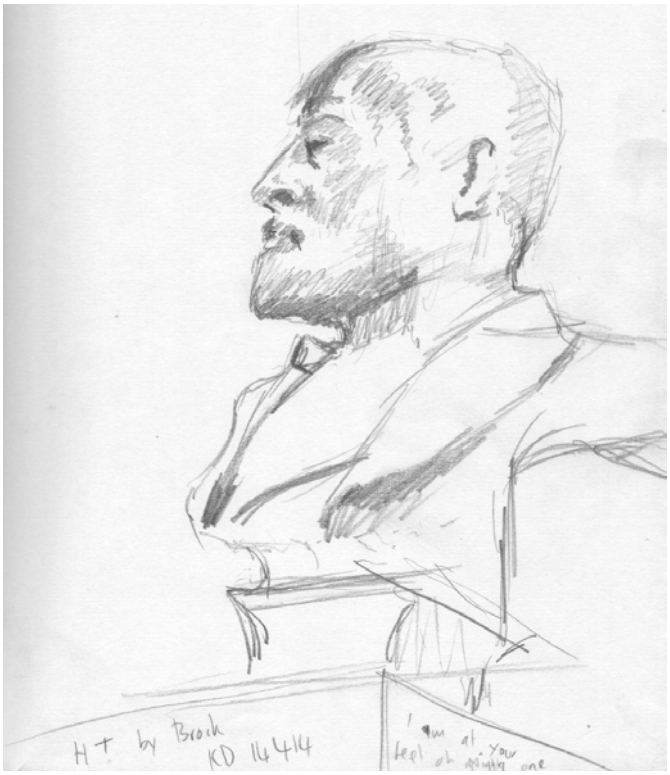


A3.28: Donkor, K., (2012) S*tudy for Yaa Asantewaa – Sargent's 'Study of Mme Gautreau.* Pencil on paper, 29.7 x 21cm.

A3.29: Donkor, K., (2014) *Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate: Luís Gama, Donald Rodney and Isabel Braganza confer'.* (or, alternative title: *Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate: the Brazilian abolitionists, Luís Gama an Isabel Braganza, confer with Donald Rodney').* Oil paints on canvas, 100 x 80cm.



A3.30: Donkor, K., (2014) *Study for unmasking Brock's Sir Henry Tate.* Pencil on paper.



A3.31: Donkor, K., (2014) *Study of Brock's Sir Henry Tate.* Pencil on paper.

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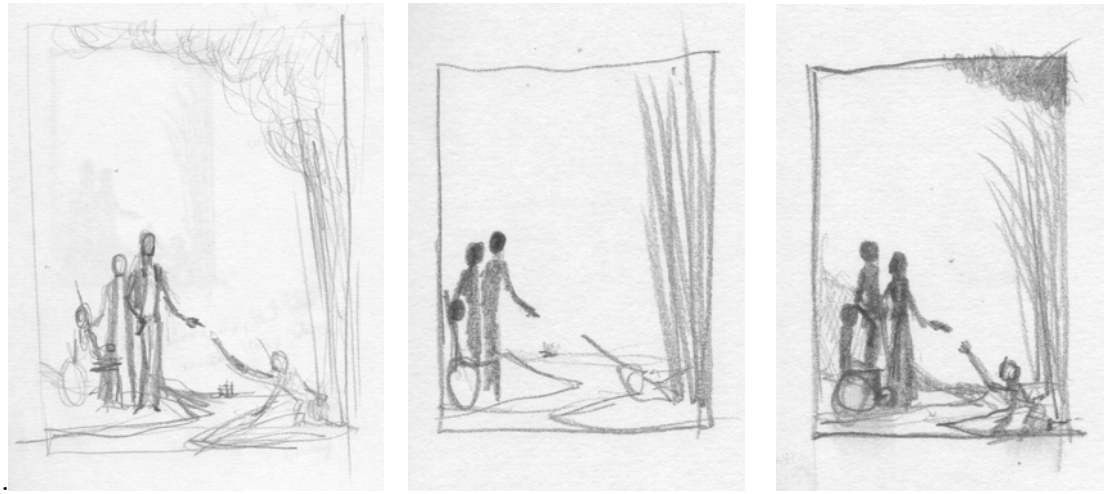
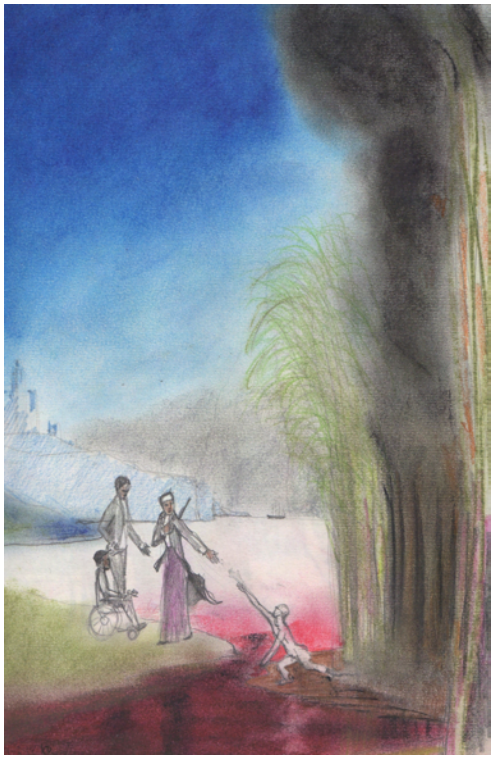
A3.33: Donkor, K., (2014) Study for Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate'. Pencil on paper

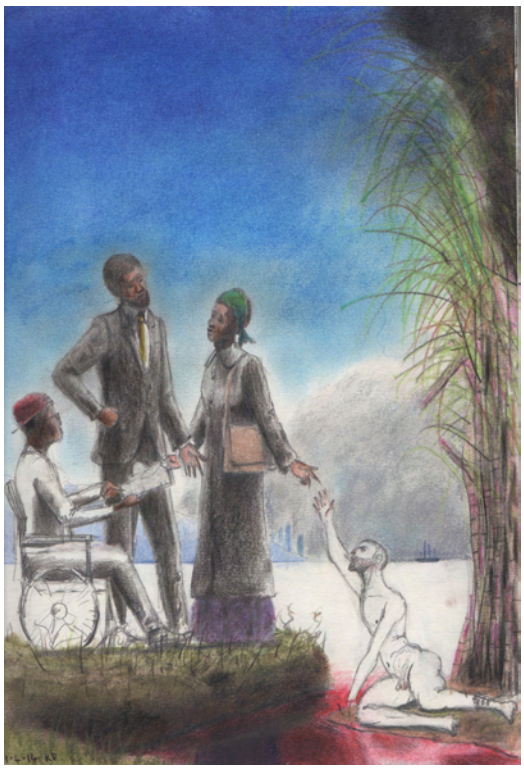


A3.34: Donkor, K., (2014) *Three Studies for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate'* . P*encil on paper.*

A3.35: Donkor, K. 2014 *Studiy for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate' by, pencil, coloured pencil and pastel on paper.*



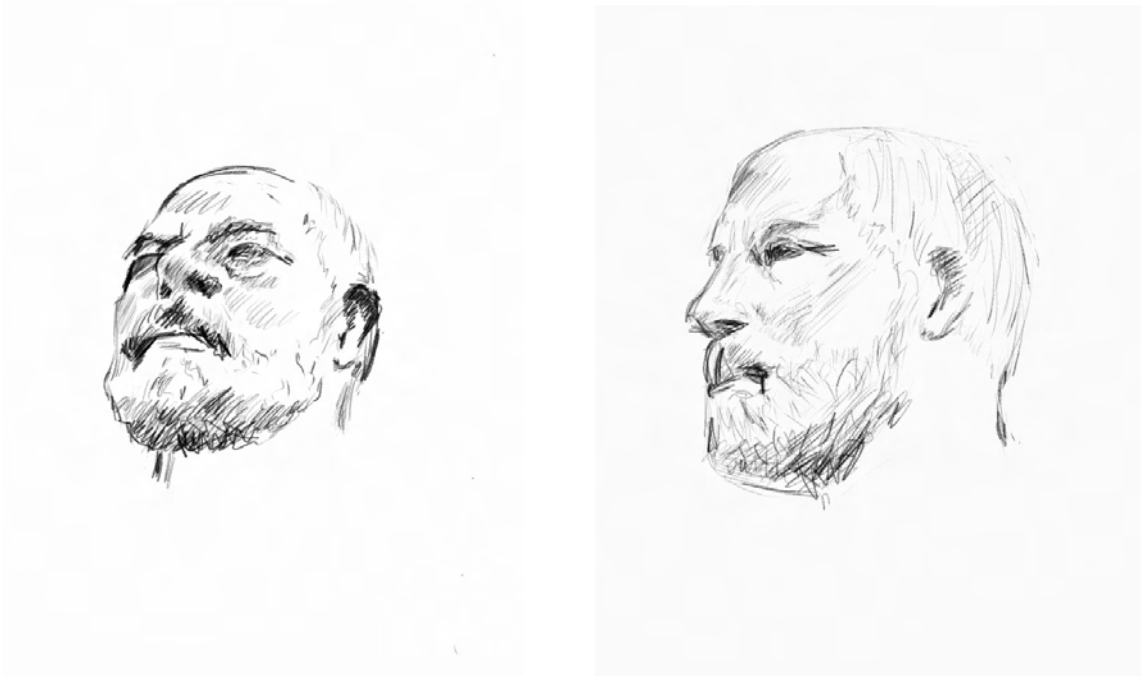
A3.36: Donkor, K., (2014), *Study for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate'. Pencil, coloured pencil and pastel on paper*



A3.37: Donkor, K., (2014), *Study for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate'. Pencil, coloured pencil and pastel on paper.*

A3.38: Donkor, K., (2014), *Study for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate' Pencil and coloured pencil on paper.*

A3.39: Donkor, K., (2014), Three Studies for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate. Pencil on paper.



A3.40: Donkor, K., (2014), *Two studies of Brock's 'Sir Henry Tate'.* Digital drawing

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A3.42: Donkor, K., (2014).*Study for 'Rodney, Gama, Tubman consider Sir Henry Tate. [Photograph].*

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A3.44: Donkor, K., (2013). *Study for 'Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate…' – Mount Isabel de Torres, Puerto Plata; Dominican Republic* [Photograph]

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A3.46: Donkor, K., (2008). *Study for 'Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate…' – Liver buildings, Liverpool; UK [Photogrpah]*

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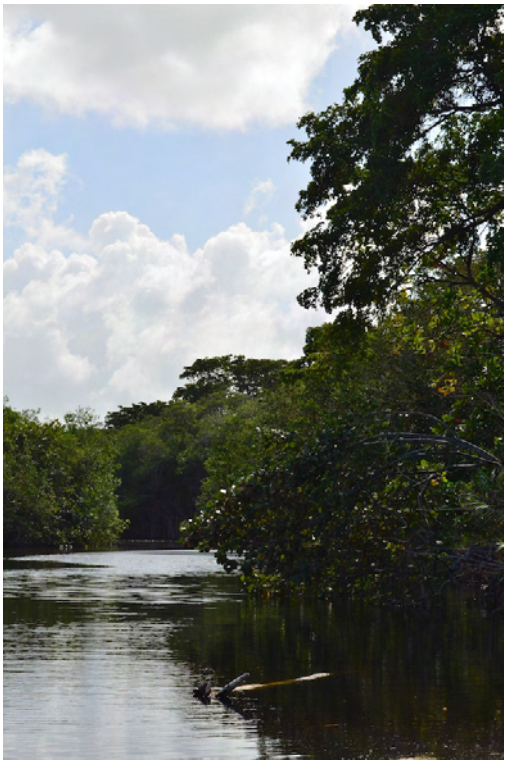

A3.48: Left: Donkor, K., (2013). *Study for 'Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Sir Henry Tate'…' – HMS Warrior, Portsmouth; UK. Right:* Donkor, K., (2013). *Study for 'Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Sir Henry Tate…' – Rio Munoz, Puerto Plata; Dominican Republic*. [Photographs]

A3.49: Donkor, K., (2013). *Study for 'Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate…' – Brock's Sir Henry Tate' on display at Tate Britain..* [Photograph]

A3.50: Left: Donkor, K., (2014). *Study for 'Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate…' –Sir Henry Tate' by Brock in Windrush Square, Brixton, London.* [Photograph]. Right*:* Donkor, K., (2014). *Study for 'Maria Firmina dos Reis reads to Henry Tate…' – Sir Henry Tate' by Brock in Streatham library, London.* [Photograph].

A3.51: Donkor, K., (2012) *Nanny of the Maroons' fifth act of mercy.*
Oil paints on canvas, 210 x 165cm.

A3.52: Donkor, K., (2012) *Harriet Tubman en route to Canada.*
Oil paints on canvas, 210 x 165cm.